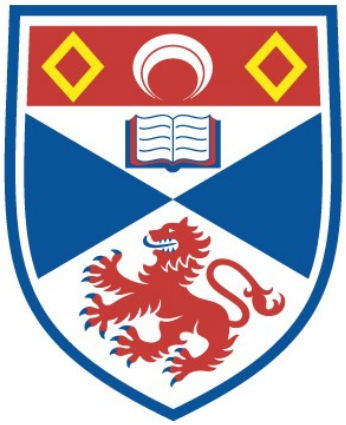
DIVINE MERCY AND JUDGEMENT IN EXODUS 34:6-7 AND A SELECTION OF ITS ECHOES

Hyunhye Junia Pokrifka-Joe

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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A Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of Divinity
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
At the University of St Andrews

HYUNHYE JUNIA POKRIFKA-JOE

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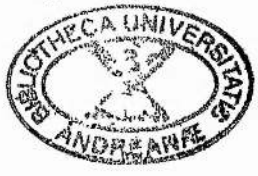

Abstract

This thesis is a study of the theological relationship between divine mercy and judgment in the attribute formula of Exodus 34:6-7 and in three of its "echoes" (Numbers 14:18, Isaiah 53:4-12 with 54:7-10, and Nahum 1:3). The primary scholarly interlocutor for this study is Walter Brueggemann. In his *Theology of the Old Testament*, Brueggemann offers an alternative interpretation of how mercy and judgment are related in these texts. Against Brueggemann, this study defends the view that in Ex 34:6-7 and these three echoes, divine mercy and judgment are not only mutually compatible but also are integrated with one another. I reach this conclusion by means of an exegesis of the above four texts that is canonical, theological, and contextual.

The introduction Chapter 1 includes a survey of relevant scholarly literature, an analysis of relevant aspects of Brueggemann's work, and a statement of the canonical method employed in the thesis. Chapter 2 provides a theological exegesis of Exodus 34:6-7 in the context of Exodus 32-34. Chapters 3-5 offer theological exegesis of the three echo-texts noted above. Chapter 6 offers a conclusion, summarising the argument and making some final observations.

Declarations

(i) I, Hyunhye Junia Pokrifka-Joe, hereby certify that I have written this thesis in its entirety, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date 8 April 2004 Signature of candidate

(ii) I was admitted as a research student in September 1998, and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in September 1999; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out between 1998 and 2003.

Date 8 April 2004 Signature of candidate

(iii) I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date 15 April 2004 Signature of supervisor

(iv) In submitting this thesis to the University of St. Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker.

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For Todd

Contents

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With sincere and deep gratitude, I wish to acknowledge a number of people who made the writing of this thesis possible. To begin, I thank my supervisor, Christopher R. Seitz, for his invaluable advice, guidance, and constructive criticism throughout the entire project. He played a significant role in shaping my canonical approach to Scripture, while giving me the freedom to develop it in my own way. I acknowledge two scholars, who through personal conversation, helped to sharpen my thinking about subjects covered in this thesis: Walter Moberly and Jacob Milgrom. I thank Bill Yarchin for reading a draft of substantial portions of my thesis and providing helpful feedback at several points. My gratitude goes to my many proofreaders whose work proved invaluable at different stages in the long process of writing and rewriting: Joanna Kimball, Grace May, Diane Wilson, Bryan Duncan, Fiona Barnard, Roy McGregor, Elizabeth Candlish, John Pokrifka, Adrien Lowery, and Melissa Simpson. I also thank my thesis examiners Gordon McConville and Nathan MacDonald for suggestions that helped to improve this thesis.

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Hyunhye Junia Pokrifka-Joe,
Azusa, California
8 April, 2004

Notes on Style

I first wish to make the following observations about the manner in which I cite sources in this study:

1. I identify sources in footnotes that include the surname of the author, the date of publication, and, if necessary, the page numbers cited (e.g. Fretheim 1991: 18, 78-80). In main text of the document, I use the first name or first initials of an author the first time I refer to him or her in a chapter. In the footnotes I use the first name or initials of an author only when a chapter contains citations to more than one author with the same surname. Full citations are given in the list of "Sources Cited" at the end of the thesis.
2. Exceptions to the above stated form occur when more information is needed to specify a source. For example, since there are multiple sets and volumes of commentaries published under the name of John Calvin in 1950, I supply additional information in parentheses: Calvin 1950 (*Minor Prophets* vol. 3): 36; similarly for other multi-volume sources: e.g., Barthélemy 1982 (vol. 2): 546.
3. Another exception occurs in regard to Walter Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*. Since some sections of this study refer to this book extensively and repeatedly, I often refer to this work with in-text parentheses containing the page number(s) only. Since it differs from the usual pattern of citation, I announce my use of this form of citation by means of an explanatory footnote.

Several other matters of style are worth mentioning briefly:

1. All translations of the Hebrew text are my own unless otherwise noted.
2. Except for some quotations, I normally refer to the Tetragrammaton as "the LORD."

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

1. The Thesis Summarized

1.1. The Problem Addressed in This Thesis

Scholars have long noted that Exodus 34:6-7 provides one of the most important affirmations about the character of the LORD[1] in the Old Testament.[2] In the last fifty years, various scholars have discussed a significant number of "echoes" (i.e. quotations, parallels, or allusions)[3] of Ex 34:6-7 found elsewhere in the Old Testament.[4] Until recent years, however, interpretations of these texts have not engaged extensively with the theological issues of these texts, especially the relationship between divine mercy and divine judgment. Sections of Walter Brueggemann's 1997 *Theology of the Old Testament* began to fill this theological lacuna by offering a more extensive theological interpretation of Ex 34:6-7 and several of its echoes. Yet Brueggemann's interpretation largely misconstrues the meaning and theological significance of the "formula" found in Ex 34:6-7 and several of its echoes. Further theological reflection on these crucial texts is necessary.

In this thesis, I offer a new interpretation of the theological meaning and function of Ex 34:6-7 and three of its echoes through a contextual-theological exegesis of them. My interpretation of these four texts focuses on the relationship between mercy and judgment within the LORD's character and acts. After the biblical text itself, my primary dialogue partner will be Brueggemann.

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[1] By the term "the LORD" (in all capital letters) I refer to יְהוָה in this thesis. I will use the traditional rendering of יְהוָה "the LORD" instead of the modern reconstruction "Yahweh," except when describing or quoting other scholars, such as Brueggemann.

[2] As a Christian scholar, I will employ the term Old Testament instead of "Hebrew Bible" or other alternatives. See Seitz 1998: 61-74. (For full citations of all the sources cited in the main text or the notes, see the Bibliography.)

[3] See the definitions for "formula" and "echoes" given in 1.3 below.

[4] In the last 50 years, the following studies are the most important: Scharbert 1957, Dentan 1963, Fishbane 1985, Gowan 1994, and Brueggemann 1997. The following sources are also helpful: Childs 1974, Spieckermann 2000, and Trible 1978: 4f. Gowan (1994: 287) and Spieckermann (2000: 309) also cite other sources.

1.2. Statement of the Thesis To Be Defended and a Plan for Its Defence

The main claim that I wish to defend in this thesis can be summarized as follows: *When rightly understood in their literary and theological contexts, Ex 34:6-7 and three of its echoes (Num 14:18, Is 53-54, and Nah 1:3) consistently present the* LORD*'s mercy and judgment as unified (non-contradictory), mutually-dependent (inter-related and inseparable), and constant aspects of the* LORD*'s character.*

This claim can be analysed into two sub-claims, the first about the formula in Ex 34:6-7 itself and the second about the relationship between the formula and its three echoes.

1. The "two halves" of the formula (Ex 34:6-7a and 7b) do not stand in contradiction to each other, nor are they theologically separable from each other. Rather, the LORD's mercy is integrated with the LORD's judgment (acts of punishment) and *vice versa*.

2. The basic theological content of the formula about God's mercy and judgment remains continuous throughout its varied applications in its echoes. Thus, the LORD's mercy and judgment remain integrated in the echoes. Some echoes emphasize the "mercy-side" of the formula more, and others emphasize the "judgment-side" more, but the echoes do not set up mercy as either contradictory or separate from judgment, or *vice versa*.

I will defend these sub-claims as follows. In Chapter 2, I will do a contextual-theological exegesis of Ex 34:6-7 which will provide an initial demonstration of sub-claim 1. In Chapters 3-5, I will do a contextual-theological exegesis of an echo or a cluster of echoes, addressing the issues of the extent, function, and theology of each echo or echo-cluster.[5] These chapters will demonstrate sub-claim 2 and will offer further support to

[5] In more detail, these chapters will do the following: (1) Determine the precise extent of the echo, what is and is not repeated of the formula, including issues of textual criticism; (2) Determine the function of the echo in its literary and theological context; and, (3) Determine how the theology of mercy and judgment is advanced and clarified by an assessment of the extent and function of the echo, and make explicit the distinctive contribution that each echo makes to a biblical theology of divine mercy and judgment.

claim 1. Then, in Chapter 6, I will sum up the findings of the previous chapters, relating the conclusions of each of the chapters to one another in an attempt to move toward a more comprehensive biblical understanding of divine mercy and judgment.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will take up several further introductory tasks: providing some definitions of key terms (subsection 1.3), discussing the scope of the thesis in relation to previous scholarship (section 2), offering a critical summary of the relevant contributions of Walter Brueggemann (section 3), and presenting an explanation of the methodology employed here (section 4). These introductory tasks will provide the necessary background for the argument undertaken in the rest of the thesis.

1.3. Some Definitions: Formula, Echo, and Related Terms

I will now explain several key terms used in this thesis. First, the term "formula" or "attribute formula" is used to refer to the text in Ex 34:6-7 which proclaims the character of the LORD. The formula as a "base text" or "mother text" is distinguished from its "echoes" or intertextual appearances which, from a canonical perspective, are identifiable reuses of the formula.[6] In other words, in the canonical order, the three echo texts follow the base text in Exodus. In the final form of the canon, the echo texts are set in the context of later episodes in Israel's history.[7]

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[6] At this point, one might object to my choice of Ex 34:6-7 as the base text for the echo texts. That is, one might argue that if I am interested in canonical order, I should chose Ex 20:5-7 as the base text since it occurs before Ex 34:6-7. While I am not in principle opposed to treating Ex 20 as the base text, to do so would not be fitting for this study for at least two reasons: (1) The echoes I have chosen have language that more specifically parallels the language used in Ex 34 than the language in Ex 20; and, (2) Ex 34:6-7 is a fuller and more complete statement of God's attributes, including those of mercy and judgment. It is thus more fitting as a text which I can compare theologically with other texts (like the echoes) treating similar themes.

[7] By speaking of "a canonical perspective" and "the canonical order," I am not making any claims about the chronological order in which the texts in question were written, edited, or redacted. See 4.2.3 for a further explanation and defence of this perspective.

The echoes of the formula stand in a continuum in terms of their degree of literary (verbal and syntactical) and thematic correspondence to the formula. Accordingly, I will sometimes distinguish between "strong" or "faint" echoes to assign them a relative location in that continuum. By a "strong echo," I mean a phrase or series of words that contain a high degree of literary (verbal and syntactical) and thematic correspondence to the divine attributes in Ex 34:6-7.

By a "faint echo," I refer to terms or phrases in the literary context of strong echoes that thematically correspond to the formula. Unlike a strong echo, a faint echo involves only such features as thematic correspondence. It is not an exact repetition of any of the literary or verbal features of the formula.[8]

A "contextual echo" is another variant of a faint echo. A contextual echo is a certain term that occurs in the literary context of the formula that recurs in the literary context of the echoes. Contextual echoes are sometimes found within the immediate context of a passage (e.g. between Ex 33:19 and Ex 34:6-7 in the context of Ex 32-34; see Chapter 2). They can also be found within the larger context (or larger unit) of a passage, such as a book or a collection of books.[9] On the largest scope, there are intertextual connections or parallels in various parts of the canon that illuminate the theological meaning and function of the terms that refer to the divine attributes in the formula and in the echoes.

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[8] See 4.2.3 for further discussion of thematic echoes.

[9] E.g., the thematic links between the various wilderness passages in the Pentateuch mentioned in Chapter 3; or, the thematic and terminological links between passages within Deutero-Isaiah mentioned in Chapter 4. Sailhamer defines this phenomenon as inner-textuality: the "inner-linkage" or inner coherence of larger units of text, such as a whole biblical book or even a collection of books like the Pentateuch (1995: 209ff).

The main passages that I consider in detail in Chapters 3-5 are all instances of strong echoes. Some of these strong echoes (such as Num 14:18) are arguably cases of "allusion." An "allusion" is an intentional reference to an earlier text or a quotation of the text for a specific theological or rhetorical purpose. Yet my thesis does not depend upon strong echoes being quotations or allusions.[10] Further, the strong echoes I consider in my thesis are not cases of exegesis, i.e. later intentional attempts to explain the meaning of the formula. They are simply intentional or unintentional reuses of the formula in a canonically later context.[11] Thus the intertextual relationship between the formula and the echoes treated in this thesis involves an asymmetrical relationship of priority between the formula and the echoes based upon obvious canonical order.[12]

2. The Scope of the Thesis and Its Relationship to Previous Scholarship

2.1. A General Statement of the Scope of the Thesis

The determination of the scope of the thesis entails my answer to two main questions. First, there is the "quantitative" question as to how many passages I would consider in the thesis. Secondly, there is the "qualitative" question as to how I would treat each passage. The short answer to the more complex qualitative question of how I would

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[10] See the similar but more elaborate definition of "allusion" given by Sommer 1998: 10-15. Note that my broader definition of an echo does not contrast with an allusion but includes it (cf. Sommer's narrower definition of an echo on 15-17; cf. 29ff). Thus, I do not claim that my reuses or echoes are definitively allusions, since this requires potentially speculative claims about the dating of various texts or about authorial intention. Besides, it is not difficult to imagine that some of the echoes treated in this study are unintentional. It is commonplace for people in any time and culture to use certain stock phrases instinctively without knowing where they come from. This would be what I regard as an unintentional use or reuse of a phrase. See subsection 4.2.3 for further discussion on the issue of intertextuality and the related issue of intentionality.

[11] See Sommer 1998: 17f, 23ff. I concur fully with Sommer's point that what authors like Fishbane refer to as inner-biblical exegesis (or even Midrash) is usually not strictly exegesis but rather a reuse of other texts, i.e. allusions or echoes (23). Exegesis or Midrash is more typical for post-biblical literature.

[12] The texts treated in this thesis occur in the same order in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament canons.

treat the selected texts is that I will do a canonical "contextual-theological" exegesis of each passage. This approach is more fully described in my discussion of methodology in section 4 below. Thus, I will only treat the quantitative question now.

The quantitative question is a matter of deciding which echoes of Ex 34:6-7 in the Old Testament I would consider. Nahum M. Sarna recognises nine quotations of the formula: Num 14:18; Jer 32:18; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2; Nah 1:3; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17.[13] Sarna lists five other possibilities (which may often fit the category of "faint" echoes): Pss. 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; Neh 9:31; 2 Chron 30:9.[14] According to Donald Gowan, "there are quotations of [Ex 34:6-7] or echoes of it in at least twenty-five other passages, including law, historical narrative, prayers and prophetic texts," but Gowan does not provide a list of these texts.[15] Among the many viable examples of echoes of Ex 34:6-7 in the Old Testament, I decided to consider three strong echoes: Num 14:18, the cluster of echoes in Isa 53:5-12 and 54:7-10, and Nah 1:3.

There are two main reasons for this selection of echoes. First, these echoes are particularly helpful in illustrating the relationship between God's mercy and judgment across different genres and contexts. Secondly, these three echoes are among the most important passages that have been used by Walter Brueggemann to argue for the contradictory nature of divine character, which I intend to refute in this thesis. Brueggemann does not provide explicit reasons for the use of these texts. But the reason he uses them appears to be that he can argue his thesis of the "disjunctive" character of God (explained in section 3) more easily with these texts than with others. Therefore, if my case

[13] Sarna 1991: 262 (n.7)
[14] Sarna 1991: 262 (n.7)
[15] Gowan 1994: 235. He also acknowledges, "commentators say very little about it."

for the integration of divine mercy and judgment can be made with these three texts, then it can arguably be made much more easily with the other echoes of Ex 34:6-7 (such as those found in the Psalms).

In addition to a chapter on each of these three selected echo-passages (Chapters 3-5), the thesis includes three other chapters within its scope. This introductory chapter includes the definitions, methods, and theological assumptions at work in the remaining chapters. It also provides a critical overview of Brueggemann's work (section 3), which will allow me to focus on his treatment of specific passages in later chapters.

In Chapter 2, a discussion of Ex 34:6-7 provides a basis for the remaining chapters of the thesis; later chapters make frequent comparisons to the findings of Chapter 2 in an effort to discern the ways in which the formula-echo relationship is marked by either continuity or discontinuity.

In my concluding chapter (Chapter 6), I summarize what I have found in each chapter and briefly discuss some implications for a biblical theology of mercy and judgment.

2.2. The Scope of the Thesis in Relation to Previous Scholarship

I will now comment on how I will limit my attention to scholarly literature that is relevant to my thesis. First, I will concentrate on literature that is directly related to the interpretation of Ex 34:6-7 or the three echoes I have chosen. Secondly, among commentaries on these four texts, I will draw mostly from theologically-oriented commentaries in the last forty years. My study will not attempt to repeat what these commentators have already accomplished, but pursue further the task of theological interpretation, with an emphasis on divine mercy and judgment. Thirdly, I will interact

frequently, and often critically, with Brueggemann's extensive theological use of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes in his *Theology of the Old Testament* (see section 3).

This restriction of scope in respect to scholarly literature has two implications. First, this thesis does not aim to summarize or comment on the great amount of material that biblical or systematic theologians have dealt with under the topic of mercy and judgment. (This is the case even with respect to Walter Brueggemann, my main interlocutor.) That said I intend that this thesis will be a relevant resource for the works of biblical or systematic theology on the nature of divine mercy and judgment. Secondly, this thesis interacts only infrequently with the growing literature on biblical intertextuality.[16] I will cite writers who treat the issue of biblical intertextuality only when they are making relevant comments on Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes.

2.3. A Historical Survey of Scholarship Related to the Formula and Its Echoes

In connection with the scope of the thesis just defined, I will now clarify what has and has not yet received sufficient scholarly attention in respect to the theology of mercy and judgment in the formula and its echoes. I will undertake this brief survey in more or less historical or chronological order. I will move through three main periods of interpretation of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes: the pre-critical period, the critical period, and the post-critical (or late critical) period.[17]

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[16] Since Renée Bloch (1957) began commenting on inner-biblical midrash, there has been great interest in how the Bible reuses and interprets itself. I will not analyse the recent post-modern literary fascination with intertextuality or its possible relevance to biblical interpretation.

[17] "Critical" is used as parallel to "modern," although "critical" is more precise (in relation to biblical studies). For a similar usage of the term, see the works of Childs.

2.3.1. Traditional Pre-Critical Theological Interpretation

I begin with the pre-critical period. Although interaction with such pre-critical interpreters is not an important part of this thesis, I refer to them sporadically. Since pre-critical interpretation is marked by much diversity, I will not attempt to generalise. Rather, I will limit my comments to two interpreters of specific relevance to my thesis: the Jewish scholar Rashi (1040-1105) and the Protestant Reformer Jean Calvin (1509-1564).[18] I choose Rashi and Calvin, because their emphasis on the "literal sense" of Scripture makes their approach relatively more acceptable in a contemporary interpretative context.

Rashi and Calvin uphold the view that the LORD is both gracious and merciful *and* judging and punishing. Rashi and Calvin see that mercy and judgment could be interpreted as contradictory and each provides a plausible solution to the possible contradiction between mercy and judgment. For Rashi, all of the divine attributes in Ex 34:6-7 are best viewed as attributes of mercy, which is similar to the view developed and defended in this thesis.[19] In Calvin's interpretation of Ex 34:6-7, mercy and judgment are distributed according to the status of their human recipients; boundless mercy is for the elect and repentant, while judgment is reserved for the reprobate and unrepentant.[20] In Ex 34:6-7, God first declares the boundless mercy, and lest the unrepentant presume upon divine generosity, God gives a stern warning about divine retribution. Either way, the relationship between God's mercy and judgment is not problematic to them.

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[18] For Rashi's emphasis on literal or *peshat* interpretation, see Sailhamer 1995: 135 and Bray 1996: 139. For Calvin's emphasis on the literal sense (which for him did not mean "literalism" or exclusion of figural readings), see Bray 1996: 202 and Hans W. Frei 1974: 20-37.

[19] Rashi on Ex 34:6-7.

[20] Yet Calvin elsewhere (1950 [*Moses* vol. 3]: 367-368) talks about divine judgment as a means of discipline for God's people.

The positive aspect of these pre-critical scholars is their methodological tendency to read the final form of the text as a coherent theological witness. The inadequate part of their work is that it does not fully and adequately explicate the details of the text and how the text itself adjudicates the relationship between mercy and judgment.

2.3.2. Modern Critical Scholarship

From the modern critical period, which extends roughly from the 18th century to certain scholars in the present, I will restrict my attention to relevant works in the last forty years. On biblical scholarship, I will first treat the studies of Ex 34:6-7, then turn to the studies of the echoes of this text, and then turn to a modern biblical theologian.[21]

(1) Comments on Ex 34:6-7 (usually found in commentaries on Exodus) have focused on a wide variety of higher-critical or historical issues and have not treated sufficiently the theological issues in it. For example, Martin Noth's only comment on Ex 34:6-7 is: "We have here an addition which is made up of customary, stereotyped phrases."[22] John Van Seters' brief form-critical analysis of Ex 34:6-7 judges this text to be the Yahwist's "compilation of liturgical statements that relate to the theme of divine forgiveness and divine judgement."[23] Postulating that the verses are a compilation of phrases from other sources may explain why there is an apparent tension between the two parts of the formula, but it does not actually *deal theologically* with that apparent tension.[24]

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[21] Despite organising my survey in this way, it is difficult to fully separate treatments of Ex 34:6-7 from treatments of its echoes, since scholars often speak about one in the course of discussing the other. That said, my organisation refers to whatever topic (Ex 34 or its echoes) is the primary concern of a given piece of scholarship.

[22] Noth 1962: 261.

[23] Van Seters, 1994: 351. His discussion of 34:6-7 focuses on showing how the text may or may not be regarded as "Deuteronomistic and part of a Deuteronomistic redaction" (345-351).

[24] Besides Noth and van Seters, this postulation is made by Dentan 1963: 35 and Krašovec 1999: 114f. Krašovec, however, is also "post-critical" and "theological" in his comments.

(2) As for the echoes of Ex 34:6-7 in the Old Testament, it appears that significant attention (as a topic in its own right) has been given to them only in the last fifty years. The full-length articles by Josef Scharbert (1957) and Robert Dentan (1963) are exemplary of the form-critical and larger historical-critical approaches, being concerned with questions of form, composition, and tradition history of the formula in its various reuses. In general, these accounts do not significantly advance the theological discussion. That said, Scharbert's form-critical study does engage the issue of the theological continuity of the echoes with the formula.[25]

(3) More substantive theological treatments of the relationship of divine mercy and judgment are found in the work of "critical" biblical theologian Walther Eichrodt (1890-1978).[26] In Eichrodt's treatment of Israel's "affirmations about the divine activity," Eichrodt considers the LORD's *hesed*, which he regards as closely connected to *berith* as an expression of God's constant care for his covenant people.[27] In this context, Eichrodt makes a helpful comment that supports my argument in this thesis: "Nor does this constancy [of the divine succour in *hesed*] exclude the punishment of sinners; rather it is evinced precisely in the fact that punishment is used to restore the disrupted covenant relationship."[28] Other aspects of Eichrodt's work sometimes go in directions that qualify

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[25] Scharbert's 1957 article shows that the various parallels or echoes of the formula in Ex 34:6-7 maintain basic continuity in theological content with the formula, despite variations in form and setting. He shows that the echoes draw out the theological content pregnant in the formula.

[26] Eichrodt 1961 and 1967. Eichrodt's stated goal for Old Testament Theology is "to present the religion of which the record are to be found in the Old Testament," a position which is open to critique (see Seitz 2001 (*Figured*): 24f). However, Eichrodt does attend fruitfully to the theological issues of the text without undue focus on historical issues. See Sailhamer 1995: 107f.

[27] Eichrodt 1961: 233.

[28] Eichrodt 1961: 233 and 1967: 475. Eichrodt here cites three passages relevant to my thesis in support of this view: Ex 34:7, Ex 33:5, and Num 14:20ff. See also Eichrodt's reference to Ex 34:7 and Num 14:18 in his comments on collective retribution (1967: 175). However, Eichrodt nowhere discusses Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes in any detail in his theology.

this statement of the unity of divine constancy of *hesed* and punishment, but this seems to represent the main force of his view.

In respect to my project in this thesis, critical scholarship has left a lacuna that needs to be filled. Critical scholarship often served to advance contextual, theological exegesis of the formula and its echoes by observing various details in these texts and their contexts that the pre-critical interpreters had not noticed. Yet even at its theological best (perhaps in Eichrodt), it failed to attend in detail to significant theological issues found in Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes, including the relationship between the mercy and judgment of the LORD.[29]

2.3.3. Towards a Post-Critical, Canonical Theological Approach

I will now turn to those writers who have helped to shape the post-critical,[30] canonical theological approach I take in this thesis (see section 4). Some of these writers would not necessarily regard themselves as "post-critical."

Among the first and most influential "canonical" theological interpreters of the Old Testament is Brevard S. Childs. Since the 1970's, Childs has put forth his version of a canonical approach to biblical exegesis and theology—an approach that will be largely

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[29] At this juncture, I will add a word about von Rad (1901-1971) and why I do not consider his work here. Von Rad focused on the dynamic history of various theological traditions within Israel. Such an approach involves very different methodological assumptions than mine (see section 4 below). For a fairly critical reading of von Rad, see Seitz 1998: 28-40.

In addition, von Rad says very little about God's character, and virtually nothing about Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes in his *Old Testament Theology*. His sole references to Ex 34:6 are in volume I, where he sees it as a theological "interpretation of the name" Yahweh (181) and as evidence that the name Yahweh gave Israel "the assurance of being able at all times to reach his heart" (183).

[30] By post-critical, I do not necessarily mean a complete abandonment of critical issues or efforts. By post-critical, I include both (a) those modes of scholarship that employ critical approaches with a view to a theological reading of the text *and* (b) those modes of scholarship that minimize the importance of critical approaches in theological interpretation.

followed in this thesis (see section 4 below). Although not extensive, Childs makes a helpful comment on Ex 34:6-7. Referring to the "judgment-side" of the formula in Ex 34:7b, he correctly says, "The manifestation of God's will as righteousness does not undercut his attribute of mercy, but rather sustains it."[31] Childs does not develop or defend this view any further, but I will take the opportunity of doing so in my discussions of the theology of God's mercy and judgment in this thesis.

In his commentary on *Exodus* (1991), Terence Fretheim shares a view of the integration of mercy and judgment similar to what is defended in this thesis, though he does not develop this view in detail.[32] Also, some of Fretheim's observations are helpful in clarifying the method used in this study.

Donald E. Gowan's work *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (1994) discusses the theology of reconciliation and other theological issues in Ex 32-34.[33] Specifically, Gowan relates some important terms in Ex 34:6-7 to the larger issue of the relationship between mercy and judgment.[34]

The massive work *Reward, Punishment and Forgiveness* (1999), by Jože Krašovec, which is a compilation of much of his previous work, is instructive in both method and theology. While Krašovec frequently relies on higher-critical results and methods, he emphasizes a canonical and literary approach to biblical texts that is agreeable to the

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[31] Childs 1992: 373. He continues, "The divine intent for Israel is not a people at rest unless it is within a city of righteousness." Moberly, who employs a methodological approach similar to that of Childs, comes to a similar conclusion in his narrative-theological reading of Ex 32-34 in his *At the Mountain of God* (1983). He says, "the point is not that the people experience either wrath or mercy, but that both wrath and mercy are in the character of God though it is his mercy which is ultimately predominant in his dealings with his people" (87). He does not comment further on the relation between mercy and judgment.

[32] Fretheim spends only one page on the formula (1991: 302).

[33] Gowan 1994: x-xi.

[34] Gowan 1994: 236-238. Gowan draws attention to some works that provide a detailed discussion of the important words found in the formula, such as Knierim 1965 and Sakenfeld 1978.

approach adopted in this thesis.[35] In addition, when he briefly treats Ex 34:6-7 and other echoes (such as Num 14:18) he comes to conclusions similar to mine regarding the compatibility of forgiveness and punishment (or mercy and judgment).

The literary and canonical emphases that emerged in recent scholarship positively advanced the theological interpretation of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes. However, there is still a need for a more thorough literary, theological study of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes that attends to the literary details, coherence, and purposefulness of the final form of the text. Such a work is needed also in response to post-critical theological works that represent more negative developments in theological interpretation, such as Walter Brueggemann's 1997 work. I will devote the next section of this chapter to a summary of aspects of Brueggemann's position that are relevant to this thesis. As I do so, I will indicate where I am critical of Brueggemann's position.

3. An Initial Summary and Critique of Relevant Features of Walter's Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*[36]

Brueggemann is well positioned to be my primary interlocutor in this thesis, because in his *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997) he gives sustained attention to Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes as a crucial locus for his discussion of the character of God. He presents his fresh statement of Old Testament theology (including his treatment of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes) in the model of a courtroom in which "testimony," "dispute," and "advocacy" (see his subtitle) are all given. As such, his theology tends to emphasize the diversity of the views of God in the Old Testament. He places sustained emphasis on the

[35] See Krašovec's introduction (1999), especially pages 8-15.

[36] The pattern for citations of Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament* in this section of this chapter (section 3) will be a page number in parentheses, either in the main text or in the footnotes.

pluralistic "testimony" or "rhetoric" of the biblical text (and its interpreters), which distinguishes Brueggemann's biblical theological approach from that of his forebears.

Brueggemann's pluralistic approach is set against the misplaced and potentially oppressive emphases on ontology or the history behind the text.[37] Accordingly, he aims to deconstruct the claims and assumptions of earlier forms of biblical interpretation and theology. Such a deconstructive task is essential for Brueggemann's concern to bring about (a certain kind of) social-political justice through biblical theology. Brueggemann states, "It is important to accent that something like 'God's preferential option for the poor' is deeply rooted in Israel's testimony, so deeply rooted as to be characteristic and definitional for Israel's speech about God" (144). The advocacy of social justice is a key that helps to unlock the rationale of his overall approach (namely, social justice). Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament* is structured and organised so as to complete his deconstructive task to create a view of God that will serve the advocacy of social justice. Thus, the core testimony (Part I) reaches the (provisional) conclusion that two incomparable and contradictory features mark God's character: sovereign, punitive power (which Brueggemann often calls "self-regard") and loving solidarity with his people. The contradiction between divine fidelity and divine judgment is at the heart of who God is. The counter testimony (Part II) reinforces the disjunctive rendering of God by claiming that Yahweh is marked by hiddenness, ambiguity, and unreliability. The result is that he has a

[37] Thus, Partrick Miller, in his forward to a collection of Brueggemann's essays, says: "In the problem that arose out of Gerhard von Rad's work as to whether what matters is Israel's testimony or some historical reality behind it, Brueggemann had cut the Gordian knot by arguing that testimony is reality" (Miller 2000: ix). I should add, however, that Miller prefaces this claim with the comment that it is "a common misreading of his work" to regard Brueggemann as denying ontological claims about God; Brueggemann has simply "ventured to set aside" such claims (ix). It is not clear that Miller has adequately grappled with how radical Brueggemann's claims are. To "cut the Gordian knot" is not a positive thing.

theological pluralism marked by the ongoing disputation of two main testimonies (the core and the counter). For Brueggemann, the character of Yahweh is left unsettled, a result that he thinks is appropriately unsettling for the interpreter. The deep root of this unsettling state of affairs is that the core testimony itself presents us with a "disjunctive rendering of Yahweh," a dualistic, self-contradictory view of the character of God. In either of the testimonies, the traditional view of God (of unity and constancy) is deconstructed.

I will close this introductory section on Brueggemann by noting how he relates to the works of other interpreters of the Old Testament. Brueggemann's approach to Old Testament theology involves an eclectic use of the interpretative approaches of other thinkers. Therefore it is difficult to regard Brueggemann as representative of a "school," but I can indicate the following about Brueggemann's scholarly "associations." Brueggemann shares with much recent literary interpretation a concern with the literary and especially rhetorical features of the final form of the text. He is not concerned with the prehistory or historical-cultural background of the text.[38] Brueggemann would be aligned with those rhetorical critics who move beyond the rhetorical features of the text to consider how those features are received or even constituted by contemporary readers (reader-response and deconstructionism).[39] Accordingly, Brueggemann emphasizes with most

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[38] For example, Brueggemann rightly regards von Rad's tradition-historical approach as speculative (This is striking in light of Brueggemann's past work in tradition-history; see Brueggemann and Wolff 1975). Yet Brueggemann follows von Rad's assumptions that the Old Testament is marked by irreconcilable theological diversity.

[39] This stands in some contrast to the preoccupation of early rhetorical criticism with the text itself and the artistry involved in its composition (see Muilenberg 1969). Trible contrasts those rhetorical critics concerned with "the art of composition" (like Muilenberg) and those concerned with "the art of persuasion" including reader response (1994: 32-48). Gillingham comments on rhetorical criticism and reader-response criticism, and the connections between them (1998: 182ff). Brueggemann says that he is moving beyond Muilenberg but in a way that is faithful to what "Muilenburg understood intuitively" (Brueggemann 1997: 59f). My view is that Brueggemann's recent work is actually largely unfaithful to Muilenberg's understanding of rhetorical criticism and that this is regrettable.

"post-modern" interpreters that the biblical text lacks any stable or determinate meaning and that largely the reader supplies any meaning.[40] Brueggemann encourages contemporary readers to join in the imaginative process of interpreting the text in a way that leads to social justice—an advocacy that he shares with various "liberationist" and "ideological" modes of interpretation. Brueggemann also shares with a wide group of scholars the belief that the biblical text is inherently and inescapably theological and that therefore exegesis rightly includes doing theology.

3.1. Brueggemann's Hermeneutical Presuppositions

In this subsection, I will briefly identify five hermeneutical presuppositions of Brueggemann's *Theology*. By "hermeneutical presuppositions," I refer to the basic assumptions that he has in interpreting the biblical text. As is arguably true of hermeneutics in general, this subsection is concerned with the interrelationships between four main factors: the text, the reality (or referent to which the text refers), the author, and the reader (or interpreter). It is to be noted that Brueggemann does not make all of the following presuppositions explicit. I will cite his explicit views wherever possible.

(1) There is Brueggemann's basic presupposition about the relationship of the text to the reality of God, namely, that *the God to whom one has access exists inside the text and not outside it; as such, the rhetoric embodied in the text constitutes the reality of God.* Brueggemann therefore believes that biblical theology ought to relinquish all "ontological" claims about God, that is, all claims about the text-independent reality of God.[41]

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[40] Longman refers to the prevalence of this view of meaning among contemporary proponents of a literary approach to biblical interpretation, despite methodological diversity (1997: 107). This is evident in the way Carr, whose methodological proclivities are quite different from Brueggemann, also regards Scripture as an "untamable text of an untamable God" (Carr 2000).

[41] Brueggemann also wishes to relinquish historical claims about the "history" to which the text refers, although this is not as relevant for the theological (and basically non-historical) concerns of this thesis. The

Brueggemann wants biblical theology to stick rather exclusively to the rhetoric, to what the text or its readers say about the reality of God. Yet, at times Brueggemann claims that there *is* no God of Israel apart from the text (itself an ontological claim) or that the rhetoric or utterance of the text *creates, originates*, or *constitutes* the reality of this God.[42]

I agree with Brueggemann that there is no way that biblical theologians can have reliable epistemological access to the biblical God apart from the text of the Bible. Further, I agree that the focus on the canonical text rather than the events behind the text is more theologically fruitful. However, I disagree with Brueggemann insofar as he denies or diminishes the text-independent reality of God, or claims that the text creates the reality of God.[43] Such claims essentially deny that the text has any real (not simply imagined) capacity for theological description or reference.[44] It may be that Brueggemann is speaking

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move away from ontology and history toward rhetoric and utterance constitutes Brueggemann's rejection of pre-modern and modern forms of "foundationalism" and his acceptance of a form of a "non-foundationalist" or "post-modern" approach to texts and their interpretation.

[42] Consider the following passages, which I quote at length: "Speech leads reality in the Old Testament. Speech constitutes reality, and who God turns out to be in Israel depends on the utterance of the Israelites or, derivatively, the utterance of the text. . . .Brevard Childs writes, in his canonical approach, about 'the reality of God' behind the text itself. In terms of Old Testament theology, however one must ask, What reality? Where behind? It is clear that such an approach derives its judgments from somewhere else, from an essentialist tradition, claims about God not to be entertained in the Old Testament text itself." (65)

"I insist that it is characteristic of the Old Testament, and characteristically Jewish, that God is given to us (and exists as God 'exists') only by the dangerous practice of rhetoric. Therefore in doing Old Testament theology I must be careful not to import essentialist claims that are not authorised by this particular and peculiar rhetoric. *I shall insist, as consistently as I can, that the God of Old Testament theology as such lives in, with, and under the rhetorical enterprise of this text, and no where else and in no other way.* This rhetorical enterprise operates with ontological assumptions, but these assumptions are open to dispute and revision in the ongoing rhetorical enterprise of Israel" (66; italics his).

[43] Brueggemann urges that one should drop all metaphysical or ontological claims partly because the history of interpretation shows that the church sometimes made false and misleading metaphysical or ontological claims about God (106). I suggest what is needed is a revision (rather than omission) of classical ideas about God.

[44] Brueggemann specifically denies that biblical language about God is descriptive. After stating that "metaphor [is] the central element in Israel's articulation of Yahweh" (70), Brueggemann says: "Metaphor is yet another case in point indicating that Israel's theological rhetoric is at its best evocative and not descriptive." However, the notion that metaphor lacks descriptive capacity is questionable. Moreover, Brueggemann is wrong to judge theological "descriptive" interpretations as "idolatrous" efforts to domesticate God (see page 70). Surely theological description in general does not need to fall into this category,

provocatively here and not literally. Whether or not that is the case, an "anti-realist" view of the text-God relationship often appears to negatively influence Brueggemann's interpretation of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes. An "anti-realist" view stands in contrast to a more traditional view (see section 4) that the God-talk of the biblical text typically stands in a relationship of "analogy" to the reality of God, so that the text refers to God truly and adequately, but not in a literalistic manner.[45] Brueggemann explicitly denounces any form of domestication of Yahweh. Yet ironically, Brueggemann's notion that "utterance constitutes reality," in principle, domesticates God within human imagination and utterance.

(2) A second and closely related hermeneutical presupposition in Brueggemann's work is that *one ought to understand the biblical text primarily as a "testimony" to Yahweh-focused views of reality*. My response to this presupposition is mixed. Testimony or witness to God is a good way to speak about the theological dimension of the Bible.[46] Testimony is a good term for expressing the committed (fiduciary), self-involving (not disinterested) advocacy in which the biblical writers (and their interpreters) are involved.

Yet Brueggemann defines and uses the category of "testimony" or "witness" in a problematic way. To begin with, Brueggemann's use of the language of "testimony" tends toward anti-realism, which is not surprising in view of his opinion on the text's relationship to the reality of God. Brueggemann often states that the biblical writers' testimony—the

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especially if one believes the "description" is based not on human imaginative efforts, but on divine revelation.

[45] This view is shared in different forms by much of pre-modern Christian Theology (e.g. Aquinas) and finds recent expression in Karl Barth. Hunsinger's exposition of Barth's "hermeneutical realism" (1987) is instructive in showing how Barth avoids both "literalism" (which affirms a literal, one-to-one correspondence between biblical language and the reality of God) and "expressivism" (which affirms that biblical language expresses emotive and imaginative human responses to God rather than any cognitive truths about God). Brueggemann frequently seems to be in danger of "expressivism," while my view seems close to Barth's.

[46] Lindbeck (1999) explains how both Karl Barth and Brevard Childs employ the category of witness.

master-category for all their rhetoric—actually creates (or "leads," "constitutes" or "enacts") the reality to which it testifies.[47] The result is that God's testimony-independent reality is questioned, and the God of the Bible is in danger of being a mere imaginative projection of those giving testimony.

In addition, such use of the term "testimony" tends to be reductionistic, ignoring the different levels of voices in the text, which the testimony of Israel already distinguished for the reader.[48] While Brueggemann claims that he is concerned with letting the text speak on its own terms, he often fails to do so. For example, the testimony of Israel in Ex 32-34 sets apart Ex 34:6-7 as the divine speech in the context of theophany. Yet Brueggemann often treats Ex 34:6-7 only as a compilation of mere human theological testimony.[49]

(3) A third hermeneutical presupposition of Brueggemann's method is that *the biblical theologian, as a reader or interpreter, is engaged in a process of imaginative testifying similar to that of the Israelites who first gave imaginative testimonies in the process of writing and redacting Scripture.* The interpreter is not a neutral observer who simply uncovers and describes the objective theological meaning of the text. Rather, the interpreter is a participant who imaginatively enters into the ongoing process of Israel's testimony and counter- (or cross-) testimony. Indeed, he speaks of interpretation as being

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[47] Brueggemann develops the analogy of the courtroom drama in an effort to describe the testimony of Israel. "[I]t is futile for the court to speculate behind the testimony. . . . when the witness utters testimony, the testimony is a public presentation that shapes, enjoins, or constitutes reality. In this sense, the testimony is *originary*: it causes to be, in the courtroom, what was not until this utterance" (121). Another case of anti-realism!

[48] Brueggemann shows awareness of the potential danger of his approach being reductionistic in an essay in which he takes a retrospective look at his 1997 work (1998: 310): "It may be that the notion [of testimony] is reductionistic, because one can, I am sure, claim that not everything is testimony."

[49] Fretheim argues that Brueggemann neglects the importance of a text's point of view: "In drawing upon Israel's testimonies to God Brueggemann makes no important distinction between Israel's speech *about* God and the word spoken *by* God to Israel; this is surprising given his emphasis on the word and its rhetorical shaping" (Fretheim 1998: 35).

undertaken in a "dramatic mode" in which one joins the Israelites in the various roles of the courtroom drama portrayed in Scripture (cf. 69f).

I recognise with Brueggemann that there is no such thing as a neutral interpreter and agree that neutrality would not even be a proper ideal for the theological interpreter. I agree that imagination is required for us to enter into "the strange new world within the Bible" (to borrow a phrase from Karl Barth).[50] However, imagination is required not because an interpreter must "create" the reality to which the Bible testifies, but simply because an interpreter needs to use imagination to recognise this reality. I disagree with Brueggemann's tendency to regard the act of interpretation in highly imaginative, open-ended, and dramatic manner. God is *not* to be domesticated by human imaginings. Brueggemann's hermeneutical presuppositions open the door to domestication of God, ironically, in the name of deconstructing domesticated notions of God.[51]

(4) A fourth hermeneutical presupposition of Brueggemann is that *both the biblical text and its interpretations are thoroughly pluralistic.*[52] Thus, Brueggemann interprets the Bible's account of a particular subject—say, the character of God—in a way that expects multiple, and sometimes contradictory, view points. The plurality of the views of God is a feature found not only in the canon of Scripture (a remnant of Israel's internal theological disputations), but perhaps more obviously in the ongoing interpretative disputes today.[53]

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[50] A title of an address in Karl Barth 1957: 28.

[51] One could add here that, despite the fact that absolute objectivity or pure neutrality is an illusion, it is possible to have "relative objectivity" in interpretation (see Barr 1982: 185ff; cf. Green 2002).

[52] See his reference to "the irascibly pluralistic character of the text" (64). He says, "The canon itself is an exercise in adjudication," and this is a process, which "applies not only to this or that subject, but to the very character of Yahweh, the God of Israel . . . . Yahweh, in the life of the text, is pulled this way and that by the adjudicating rhetoric of Israel" (64).

[53] It is sometimes difficult to distinguish these two aspects of pluralism (the ancient and the contemporary) in Brueggemann's work, since he understands the present day interpreter to be entering into disputes that started in ancient Israel. Though the disputes have altered their faces, the disputes have not yet ceased. Also, one sometimes wonders whether Brueggemann takes contemporary pluralism (whether in overall metanarratives

Brueggemann does not regard pluralism as implying that "anything goes" or that interpreters are confronted with a myriad of limitless options" (718). Rather, interpreters are faced with only a few, often only two, "conflicting perspectives" which persist in an ongoing, unsettled dispute or dialectic (718; cf. 71ff). Indeed, Brueggemann consistently sees the text in terms of a theological *dialectic* in which two views are in conflict, one often being the "main" view of the text, and one being a "subversive" or deconstructive view that Brueggemann wants to emphasize. Brueggemann thus is not really a consistent pluralist. He ultimately has a certain settled view and a settled agenda (a commitment to his version of "justice") that is served by his various dialectics.[54]

I agree that the canonical text is marked by pluralism, but in the texts examined in this thesis, the pluralism is not nearly as radical or unsettled as Brueggemann suggests. This thesis will show Brueggemann's claims for both textual and interpretative pluralism in relation to Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes are overstated. The theological pluralism in the Old Testament is complemented by an equally striking theological convergence or unity, and theological unity should not be overlooked by contemporary theological interpretation.[55] It seems the great plurality of interpretation is due as much to the academy's passion for novelty and inventive scholarship as it is to honest disagreement rooted in the inherent difficulty and density of the biblical material. Pluralism in interpretation can draw out a richness of textual meaning that cannot be reduced to singularity. However, pluralism sought for its own sake can serve to confuse and obfuscate the plain sense of the text.

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or particular interpretation) and *reads it into* the biblical text. After all, he assumes that a mode of interpretation must be congruent with the cultural context (see below).

[54] See Levenson 2000.

[55] See Rendtorff (1994: 7f) and subsection 4.2.1 of this chapter.

(5) A fifth and final interpretative presupposition is that *the theory and practice of biblical theology must be congruent with the contemporary cultural context in which it is developed.* This presupposition is based upon a more general presupposition, namely: "*[I]n every period of the discipline, the questions, methods, and possibilities in which study is cast arise from the sociointellectual climate in which the work must be done*" (11; italics mine). Thus, Brueggemann urges the idiom of testimony and disputation between testimonies (746; cf. 727).[56]

For Brueggemann, the contemporary (Western) context of biblical interpretation includes three main groups: the basically secular majority in society, the Christian community, and the Jewish community. Brueggemann seems to regard these three groups as equal partners in an ongoing interpretative dispute or conversation. Brueggemann regards his own work as faithfully reflecting the contemporary intellectual milieu. Brueggemann also regards his work as "Christian" in basic biases (i.e. he says he cannot help but read the Old Testament "towards the New Testament"). He also strives to be "Jewish" in character in his desire to overcome the long-running supercessionism and anti-Semitism that have marked Christian biblical scholarship. I will now turn to some relevant aspects of Brueggemann's relationship to these three groups.

The presupposition regarding the "normative" significance of the contemporary Western intellectual milieu is basic to all the other presuppositions I have already outlined. Because contemporary culture is focused on rhetoric (often to the point of being

[56] He opposes liberal rationalism and scholastic conservatism as failing to maintain this unsettled and unsettling idiom (747).

"anti-realist"), so should contemporary biblical theology and interpretation be focused on rhetoric.[57] Because contemporary culture is pluralistic and dialectical, so should biblical theology (or even the text itself) be pluralistic and dialectical.

Brueggemann's relationship to the adjective "Christian" is ambiguous, perhaps intentionally so. Brueggemann recognises that Christianity is his "tradition" and that Christian presuppositions will inevitably influence him. Yet he also desires to avoid the "fideistic" or "ecclesial" modes of interpretation, which he views as "authoritarian" or even "oppressive."[58] He favours certain (apparently Enlightenment-based) notions of free inquiry and a "healthy" measure of scepticism or doubt.[59]

Brueggemann rightly desires to attend to the Jewish community as a witness to the truth alongside the Christian community (745). However, he wants to go beyond that to pursue an approach to biblical theology that he regards as "Jewish" in many of its key features. Brueggemann counts his reflection on the Holocaust, use of deconstruction, dialectic, "Midrash," and even Freudian psychoanalysis as evidence of the "Jewish" character of his work (see 3.3 below). Many Jewish scholars, however, would find objectionable the identification of some of these features as "Jewish."[60] Moreover, I would

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[57] At times, Brueggemann seems to reverse tactics by using a seemingly universal claim to say what should be done in the contemporary situation, as when he says: "our post-modern situation . . . must make a major and intentional investment in the practice of rhetoric, *for the shape of reality finally depends on the power of speech*" (71; italics mine). More subtly, he says: "The interpretive crisis and possibility of the church now is that it is discovering that the Enlightenment is *not its natural habitat*. Therefore the church is having to relearn its own way of reading" (14; italics mine). Brueggemann here appears to be saying that the Enlightenment is an inherently "unnatural" habitat for the church.

[58] He does not say why "fideistic" necessarily means "oppressive," even if this has been the case at times in the past. Brueggemann rightly speaks of the importance of understanding the biblical God as a "relational" God and the reader as a communal reader. However, he does not appear to draw out the implications of these observations.

[59] How this relates to statements like the following is unclear: "Every reading in important ways is fideistic and confessional, including those readings that reject the theological claim of the text." (52)

[60] See Levenson 2000.

point out that a Christian interpreter does not need to strive to be "Jewish" (as if that were possible) in order to show respect to Jewish interpreters and to draw from their interpretative insights.[61]

3.2. Brueggemann's Methodology

I will now comment on Brueggemann's methodology—the concrete rules that govern the way that Brueggemann does biblical theology. There are five such rules, which are inter-related with and sometimes expressions of his hermeneutical assumptions.[62] Here I will consider what Brueggemann says about such rules and what is evident in his actual practice, recognising that these two may not always agree.

(1) Brueggemann offers the general rule that *the biblical theologian should take the text "on its own terms."*[63] Among the most important implications of this rule is that the proper object of interpretation is the text in its final canonical form, rather than the text's pre-history. In this respect, Brueggemann shares much in common with canonical-critical theological interpreters such as Childs.[64] Taking the text seriously as the object of theological inquiry involves exegesis of particular texts in all their detailed rhetorical and literary complexity (53ff). So far, I stand in agreement with Brueggemann.

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[61] Thus, I will draw freely and respectfully from Jewish commentators like Rashi, Sarna, and Jacob Milgrom in this thesis.

[62] I recognise others might call methodological rules (3.2) hermeneutical assumptions (3.1), and *vice versa*.

[63] Brueggemann makes this assertion (in different ways) many times in his book. See especially his comments made in the course of his appreciative survey of Muilenberg's approach to rhetorical criticism (53ff). Brueggemann himself studied under Muilenberg, but in my view, takes the "rhetorical approach" in a significantly different (and less text-focused) direction. Specifically, Brueggemann tends to shift the emphasis from the "canonical text" (as an authority in which canonical form and normative theological content are inseparable) to a "canonical interpreter" (Childs 1992: 71ff; cf. Brueggemann 1991: 119-142).

[64] In fact, Brueggemann's basic approach in theory is even more exclusively focused on the final form of the text than Childs's approach. Unlike Childs, Brueggemann generally does not devote space to diachronic matters. In this respect, I tend to follow the approach of Brueggemann over Childs, even though my overall sympathies lie more with Childs' mode of theological interpretation.

Difficulties arise, however, in how Brueggemann defines and carries out the interpretation of Scripture. First of all, Brueggemann defines interpretation as "readiness to give full and imaginative expression to the claims of the text itself" (104; cf. 58). As such, interpretation is often anything but an assent to "the claims of the text itself."

Secondly, there is a gap between Brueggemann's interpretative practice and his claim to focus on the final form of the text. While Brueggemann explicitly rejects historical-critical strategies and speculation as theologically unfruitful, his typically dualistic interpretation of the text appears either to presuppose or reproduce the conclusions of such an approach.[65] That is, Brueggemann's interpretative practice (especially of the formula and its echoes) tends to presuppose that a text is essentially made up of different theological "sources" or perspectives. In addition, as source-critics had done, Brueggemann conceives of these perspectives as being at odds with each other, often failing to consider the possible complementarity or convergence among plural perspectives.[66] Thus, in his interpretation of divine character as witnessed in Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes, Brueggemann has, in effect, taken typical higher-critical or tradition historical perspectives on these texts to their logical theological conclusions.[67]

For Brueggemann, the canon is unable to arbitrate disputations even on the most central theological matters. For Brueggemann, "Israel offers odd, incidental, concrete, episodic case studies" in striving to interpret its God (206), but nothing like an overall

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[65] For example, he states as a given that "the Old Testament in its final form is a product of and a response to the Babylonian exile"(74). This statement may well be true, but Brueggemann's method does not appear to allow him to make such "historical" comments.

[66] See Rendtorff's "Canonical Interpretation" for a contrast between higher-critical approaches to the canonical approach (1993: 7-12).

[67] See Seitz 2001 (*Figured*): 26f for a similar assessment of Brueggemann. Seitz points to the connection between the atomistic and disjunctive tendencies of Brueggemann's earlier tradition-historical work (Brueggemann and Wolff 1975) and his recent work in Old Testament theology.

unified, coherent construal of God's character.[68] Thus, Brueggemann fails to pay attention to those features of the text that tend towards theological unity, generalisation, or closure. Brueggemann has a right to emphasize some theological features of the text and ignore others. The problem is that Brueggemann does so in a manner that sometimes seriously distorts the theological witness of the biblical text.

(2) One aspect of taking the text on its own terms is that one ought to interpret a text in and according to its literary context.[69] Accordingly, Brueggemann agrees with James Barr's methodological rule that "*words can only be understood in the context of their usage in sentences.*" Brueggemann generally fulfils it in his interpretative practice.

The problem is that to say that the sentence is the interpretative context of words or phrases *does not go far enough.* Literary context includes larger literary units, including the place of sentences in pericopes and larger sections, a book, groups of books, and ultimately the whole canon of Scripture (which for the Christian includes the New Testament). In his *Theology of the Old Testament*, Brueggemann gives insufficient attention to the methodological importance of context in the larger sense. Only occasionally does he show sensitivity to context on the supra-sentence level, either in theory or in practice.[70]

Brueggemann's approach is frequently marked by a definite tendency towards "atomism" or "proof-texting"—i.e. taking an element in the text out of its larger context in

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[68] This would fit with his hermeneutical assumption about plurality or dialectic in the text, as described above. Again, Brueggemann calls this unsettledness "Jewish," against a supposedly "Christian" drive for "settledness" (80ff). This kind of generalisation is a personal judgment of Brueggemann's and would be objectionable to many Christians and Jews.

[69] For my purposes, I will concentrate (like Brueggemann) on literary context, leaving historical or cultural context aside (see 4.2 below).

[70] Only occasionally does Brueggemann pay attention to supra-sentence context, when such an attention can reinforce his interpretation.

order to support a particular (often unconventional, neglected, or "deconstructive") theological point.[71] Brueggemann rarely *discusses* a passage in a way that articulates in detail what that passage means in its literary context, how it functions there in light of the larger argument of a literary unit, a book, or the canon.[72]

Perhaps even more revealing is Brueggemann's discussion of the positive role of a "Midrashic" style of interpretation in biblical theology. The following quotations are examples of what Brueggemann assigns to the "work of Midrash":

> (a) To focus on the ill-fitting element and to extrapolate surpluses of meaning that lie well beyond the explicit articulation of the text (325).
> (b) To expose what is hidden in the text, which might be an embarrassment to the main claim of the text (325).
> (c) To exercise enormous interpretative imagination, *so as to give visibility and emphasis to precisely what is nearly invisible or pointedly de-emphasized in the text* (326; my italics).

When I couple these characterisations of Midrash[73] with Brueggemann's own desire to regard Midrash as a kind of "analogue" for the theology of the Old Testament (326), I

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[71] For a similar criticism of Brueggemann's approach, based upon his earlier work *The Bible and Post-modern Imagination* (1993), see Hart 1997. Hart questions whether Brueggemann's privileging particular 'little texts' is really the same as "allowing them to speak with their own voice" (203). For Hart, to "isolate a 'little text' from its wider textual context and allow it to speak with its 'own' (possibly scandalous and offensive) voice" may be an arbitrary decision that could "do violence to the larger textual wholes" of the canon of Scripture. He continues, "There is a serious danger of such a strategy resulting in a levelling of all bits of texts so far as their significance is concerned, and the development of a new form of 'proof-texting' which manages to justify just about anything 'from the Bible.'" Finally, Hart points out, "If a particular text is not informed and restrained by its wider biblical context then it will certainly be informed by some other context or set of factors" (203). See also Seitz 2001 (*Figured*): 26f.

[72] Of course, it is *possible* that Brueggemann is sensitive to the context of the passages he cites without showing his readers how he is doing so. In other words, he may have done contextual homework on these passages before making his theological assertions. It is also possible that he has not done so, and this seems the more likely possibility because of his theoretical comments (especially about Midrash) and the nature of his sometimes cavalier treatment of texts like Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes.

[73] The accuracy of Brueggemann's portrayal of Midrash is questionable. For example, traditional Midrash (in its early stages) probably did not regard *any* part of the biblical canon as finally inconsistent with other parts of it (on this see Bray 1996: 57). Regardless of the accuracy of his portrayal of Midrash, there are differences between traditional Midrash and Brueggemann's own interpretative approach. The difference includes Brueggemann's observation that Midrash "is interested in every detail of the text" and his more selective concern "with speech about Yahweh" (326).

see that *Brueggemann is intentionally being non-contextual for what he regards as a higher cause.* He takes it as admirable to side-step what the context stresses (explicitly or implicitly) as the "main claim" of the text in favour of what may be "pointedly de-emphasized in the text."

In the end, Brueggemann's initial desire to be "contextual" (at least to treat words in the context of sentences) gives way to an approach to biblical theology that is "non-contextual" or "anti-contextual." His "non-contextual" approach includes the practice of emphasizing any alleged "ill-fitting particularities"[74] in the text even when the larger context de-emphasizes or harmonizes them. His tendency to emphasize what the text de-emphasizes is underlined in the next hermeneutical rule to which Brueggemann adheres.

(3) The third methodological rule that I identify in Brueggemann's work is the notion that *one should be suspicious of the surface reading of a text.* Brueggemann appeals to Freudian psychoanalysis for this methodological rule. Brueggemann says, "Freud's assumption is that a surface articulation or representation of reality is to be treated with great suspicion and not to be taken at face value" (327). Adopting Freud's theory about repression as "a practice of pervasive deception" (327), the "surface presentation" of the text is seen as deceptive. Interpretation therefore consists in disclosing and emancipating "what is repressed, hidden, denied, and ill-fitting" (327; cf. my comments on Midrash above). This "hermeneutic of suspicion," also important to ideological or liberationist

[74] To be sure, Brueggemann is right in saying that what appears to be "dissonance, or the surface irregularity in the articulation of Yahweh . . . is not to be explained away literarily or historically, but is indeed a theological datum" (326). Yet what Brueggemann treats as "surface irregularity" often is, upon closer inspection, not really "ill-fitting particularity" at all. In such cases, features of the text are *made to be* ill-fitting in Brueggemann's atomistic treatment of words or terms or sentences, which disregards the larger literary and theological context. This is reminiscent of his earlier tradition-historical work (see Brueggemann and Wolff 1975; cf. Seitz 2001 [*Figured*]: 26f).

interpretation (e.g. Marxist and feminist readings), is important to Brueggemann's reflections on the character of the God of Israel.

Brueggemann uses Freudian psychoanalysis as a tool in his programme of "deconstructing" any hegemonic claims of the biblical text or its interpreters. Traditional Christian and Jewish conceptions of God are deconstructed, and Yahweh's "unsettled interior life" (328) is thus retrieved for Brueggemann. God is ultimately seen as potentially "abusive," e.g. as responsible for the Holocaust.[75]

Besides unrestrained anthropomorphism, such an approach involves a more general imposition of modern categories onto the biblical text and its world. More specifically, it involves the danger of imposing onto the biblical God psychoanalytic categories that were designed for sinful and dysfunctional humans. Brueggemann may attempt to justify such a hermeneutical imposition by saying that it is "contemporary" or even "Jewish,"[76] but this is inadequate.[77]

Furthermore, Brueggemann's claim that an interpreter needs to push beyond the "surface presentation" of the text itself undercuts certain aspects of his approach. For example, many of Brueggemann's claims about God's self-contradictory or disjunctive character rely on surface readings or the "surface presentation" of biblical texts such as

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[75] Brueggemann (329) says that the Holocaust "happened well beyond the horizon of the text" (he cites Richard L. Rubenstein in support of this claim). One danger of attributing the Holocaust to Yahweh and using it as evidence for divine injustice is that it can detract from efforts to deal with the obvious human cause of the Holocaust: the sin of anti-Semitism (whether Christian or pagan). The proper response to the Holocaust is not blame-shifting from humanity to God, but radical repentance.

[76] Brueggemann justifies his appeal to psychoanalysis by claiming that it is "a thoroughly Jewish enterprise and is much informed by midrashic practice" (327). In this, he follows Susan A. Handelman's suggestion in *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982).

[77] Brueggemann wrongly assumes that if something is "Jewish" that it automatically stands in continuity with the Old Testament, and is thus helpful to interpreting it. Ironically, Brueggemann's claim to be doing something that is "Jewish" and thus "biblical" can render him unable to read the text at face value and according to its own rhetoric.

Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes. A properly "deep" reading of these texts involves careful attention to all the features of its literary context and actually undermines his reading, leading to a more coherent (rather than disjunctive or dualistic) view of God's character. Thus, I can agree with Brueggemann that it is important to probe beneath the surface reading of a text. However, this should be done without the "suspicion" encouraged by psychoanalysis. Reading the text on its own terms certainly does not encourage the reader to be suspicious of the main emphasis of the text in favour of what the text de-emphasizes or leaves unsaid.

(4) Another methodological rule for Brueggemann is that *biblical theology should always emphasize particulars over generalities and should always move from the particular to the general and not vice versa.* This rule is related to his tendency to focus on "ill fitting particularities" in the text. I will show how this tendency works itself out in the main contours of his *Theology of the Old Testament.*

Brueggemann unfolds the core testimony of Israel by a kind of "grammatical" analysis of the characteristic sentences of Israel's testimony about Yahweh. Thus, Brueggemann moves from verbs (verbal sentences) to adjectives ("Yahweh's Characteristic Markings") to nouns ("Yahweh as Constant"). The order of presentation is significant. Brueggemann begins with what he regards as primary or most basic within Israel's core testimony towards what is secondary or less basic. Thus, the more concrete verbal sentences describing the specific acts of Yahweh are considered the foundational and deepest strata of Israel's testimony. In contrast, the more general and abstract adjectival and nominal formulations are seen as attempts to reflect on the more basic verbal sentences (230). The specific and concrete precede that which is more general and abstract.

One difficulty with the rule of prioritising particulars is that it rather arbitrarily and indiscriminately renders as provisional and derivative all the "abstract" theological generalisations of the Old Testament. There is no compelling reason *internal* to the biblical text to prioritise the particular over the general. There is probably no internal reason to prioritise the general over the particular either—at least as a universal rule. Rather, biblical theology should allow biblical generalisations about God and particular descriptions of God's acts to enter into a mutually-interpretative relationship, placing the priority wherever a given passage and its context emphasize. In this thesis I hope to exemplify this more balanced approach in the relationship between the generalisations of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes and the particularities of their contexts.[78]

(5) Brueggemann also tends to follow the rule (whether explicitly or implicitly) that *biblical theology ought to highlight bipolarities and dialectical relationships in the text.* I have already alluded to Brueggemann's tendency to "bipolarise" under my discussion of his assumption of "pluralism" (see 3.2 above), but I can further explain his procedure for doing "dialectical" biblical theology.[79]

"Dialectic," the interplay of opposition between one view and another, is central to the process of deconstructing any theological views in the text or in society that are dominant or hegemonic.[80] Put differently, deconstruction is "thoroughly dialectical"

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[78] The generalisations given in the biblical text need to be distinguished from the interpreters' provisional attempts to generalise what they find in the biblical text.

[79] For Brueggemann, to be dialectical is a way of undertaking the "deconstruction" promoted by post-modern French philosopher Jacques Derrida (329ff). All truth-claims, certainly any allegedly universal and absolute claims about the character of Yahweh, are to be deconstructed in an ongoing process of dialectic and disputation. Yet Brueggemann, claiming to follow Derrida, points to an exception: there is one claim that cannot and ought not be deconstructed, namely, justice (331; cf. 740).

[80] For Brueggemann, a position of hegemony renders a view problematic, irrespective of any other merits it might have. But, that a view has been dominant (i.e. popular) does not necessarily mean that it was oppressive, let alone false.

(331).[81] In an illuminating footnote, Brueggemann observes that a dialectical-deconstructive manoeuvre finds an analogy in "the sailing imagery of tacking," a procedure in which one changes the direction of the ship repeatedly so as to follow a zigzag course.[82] First, one affirms a claim; then one opposes it by means of a counter-claim, showing that the original claim is provisional and destructible. Then one does the same to the counter-claim by means of another counter-claim, and so on.

This dialectical "tacking" manoeuvre is evident throughout Brueggemann's work on both macro and micro levels. In other words, Brueggemann's programme of deconstruction is marked by dialectic strategies both in the overall organisation of his work and in the specific theological claims he makes in reading particular texts. On the macro-organisational level, there is the dialectic of the core-testimony and the counter-testimony—the main dialectic of his *Theology of the Old Testament*. Thus, Brueggemann first lays out what he takes to be Israel's characteristic claims in the core testimony, which correspond largely to what he thinks the text itself emphasizes when understood according to its own terms (i.e. its main or dominant voice). Then he voices the claims of the counter-testimony, which he thinks deconstruct or subvert the core testimony.[83]

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[81] In this respect Brueggemann clearly draws from post-modern literary and philosophical deconstructionism, as represented by Derrida, and the biblical scholars that follow him (329ff). Longman notes that deconstructionist analysis is (ironically) predictable in form: the deconstructionist interpreter always looks for "an *aporia*, or basic contradiction" in a text and then uses this to show forth (or even celebrate) indeterminacy of the text's meaning (Longmann 1997:106). This observation has obvious application to Brueggemann's dialectical approach, in which the most fundamental contradiction is found in the disjunctive character of the God of Israel.

[82] He continues, "Blumenthal sees the critique and affirmation of God as manoeuvres similar to tacking, both of which are necessary to serious biblical faith" (Brueggemann, 331, footnote 24). He cites David Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God* (1993).

[83] In overall effect, Brueggemann tends to give more weight or emphasis to the deconstructive counter-testimony (the "unsolicited" and "embodied" testimonies tend to reinforce the counter testimony). In his own description:

> Yahweh and Israel's irrevocable commitment to justice [requires] that all false starts on the part of Yahweh be problematized, critiqued, and subverted. These false starts may occur in overstated self-

There is another aspect of the macro-level dialectical strategy in Brueggemann, which is more immediately relevant to my thesis. Within the core testimony itself, there is dialectic between two views of God, the disjunction between (negative) sovereignty and (positive) solidarity. This dialectic makes Brueggemann's version of the core testimony "unstable" and (conveniently) opens it to the critique of the counter testimony and other testimonies. Thus, the "counter-testimony" is already included in Israel's core testimony. What Brueggemann presents as counter- and unsolicited-testimonies are already grounded in the core testimony. The counter- and unsolicited-testimonies simply serve to reinforce and emphasize the "negative part" of the core testimony.[84]

There is also dialectical deconstruction on a micro-level. In any given text discussed, Brueggemann imposes dialectic. Thus, in a given text, God is just and unjust; God is for Israel and uncompromisingly for himself; God can be trusted and unreliable; God is sovereign and impotent; God is present and absent. My comments throughout the thesis on Brueggemann's interpretations of various texts provide examples of his use of micro-dialectical strategy. His micro-dialectical strategy serves his overall presentation of the Bible and the biblical God as being marked by "profound disjunction" and thus unstable and susceptible to deconstruction.

> aggrandising sovereignty, or in self-indulgent pathos that gives in too much to the beloved [as in core testimony]. In good deconstructive fashion, Israel refuses to leave Yahweh alone, because *Yahweh has not yet got it right*. And Israel's cross-examination [thus counter-testimony] attends to that work vis-à-vis Yahweh (331; my interpretative interjection in the brackets).

This description only makes sense when one exchanges "Israel" (and perhaps "Yahweh") with Brueggemann's own idiosyncratic theological views!

[84] It is also noteworthy that much of the exegetical material in his counter-testimony is already present or assumed in the "negative utterance" of the core testimony, which seems to be a great set-up for making the counter-testimony reinforce (rather than make problematic) the core testimony. In this way, the new testimonies (the "constructions" that deconstruct) do not in effect "become problematic" as Brueggemann says they should (331) but rather authorise the core-testimony in all its instability.

(6) Lastly, Brueggemann observes the rule that *biblical interpretation and biblical theology ought to promote and be guided by the goal of socio-political justice.* This point requires the consideration of several issues that are close to the heart of Brueggemann's work and of my response to it. I begin with several questions of clarification.

The first question to be asked is this: what kind of justice does Brueggemann wish to advocate? Brueggemann defines justice in terms of preferential concern for the poor and oppressed. More specifically, it is a kind of distributive justice that calls for the redistribution of the wealth and power of the "haves" to the "have-nots" (736ff). Accordingly, he says "this passion for justice stands as a revolutionary, subversive challenge to Jews and to Christians, and to every alternative meta-narrative" (740).

Secondly, what does Brueggemann say about the importance of such distributive justice for his own version of Old Testament theology? In the fifth and final part of his book, Brueggemann makes plain that distributive socio-political justice is the central advocacy of his book, the main contemporary "cause" for which his book is written. Brueggemann states, "Theological interpreters of the Old Testament at the end of the twentieth century must, in my judgment, pay primal attention to this irreducible claim of justice" (740).[85] This claim, says Brueggemann, is what the "Mosaic revolution" first articulated and thinkers like Jacques Derrida are restating in our time. Brueggemann further states that Yahweh is generally a promoter or a servant of distributive justice—either by standing in solidarity with the poor and oppressed and actively delivering them, or

[85] Earlier in the book, Brueggemann qualified the relation of his work to the advocacy of justice: "I do not suggest that an Old Testament theology should be in the service of such a revolutionary struggle"(113). He continues that Old Testament theology "cannot, however, be indifferent to that context of interpretation," i.e. from global power issues and the struggle for justice.

by using sovereign power to inflict violent punishments on the enemies of justice. This is what the core testimony's disjunctive rendering of God emphasizes.

However, there are exceptions to Yahweh as a promoter of justice, as the counter-testimony emphasizes. Brueggemann thinks Yahweh is at times "unjust"—either with an unlimited violence (as he thinks is witnessed in Nahum) or with an incriminating inactivity (as witnessed in Israel's complaints) (221). God fails the test of theodicy for Job and for the victims of the Holocaust. Thus, Brueggemann boldly states:

> Justice is held up as ultimate, and Yahweh as an agent of justice is critiqued for failure of justice. That is, Israel is aware that there is more to Yahweh than justice: there is holiness and downright capricious irascibility. . . . In the tradition of Job (and of Derrida), I suggest, Yahweh is held to justice, and if Yahweh cannot subscribe to this earthly passion, then the claims of heaven must be deconstructed (740).

The biblical text and the character of Yahweh are dialectical and deconstructible for Brueggemann, subject to being tested by justice as he conceives it (735ff and 331f). Brueggemann believes that employing justice as the ultimate, non-dialectical, irreducible and indestructible criterion of Old Testament theology allows him to escape a situation in which the process of theological dialectic becomes "an endlessly exhausting enterprise that is bottomless in its negative force" (331).

Lastly, what evidence is there in Brueggemann's interpretative practice for the importance of distributive justice? Brueggemann says that his affirmation of pluralism and his methodological use of dialectic and deconstruction are ways to establish justice, because they deny and deconstruct the claims of metanarratives or absolute truth claims that under-gird and legitimatise unjust and oppressive social systems. Accordingly, if one begins with the assumption that Brueggemann is writing a theology of the Old Testament for the purpose of promoting his view of distributive justice, then many features of his

approach and their inter-relationship, that would otherwise seem arbitrary, begin to make sense. The disputatious testimonies of the biblical text itself are, in and of themselves, seen as examples of such acts of deconstruction. His unstable and destabilising account of disjunctive rendering of Yahweh serves to rule out any social systems that would use an unquestioned dominant view of God to underwrite their policies as "divinely given" and to potentially justify their injustice. Brueggemann's appeals to Midrash, Freudian psychoanalysis, and Marxism are meant to serve, at least in part, his disjunctive rendering of Yahweh.[86] Insofar as Brueggemann's approach is an ordered whole, it appears to be ordered by and directed towards the promotion of social justice by means of an unruly and irascible God. Brueggemann's sometimes unruly and always unpredictable Yahweh can serve the purpose of "scaring" people into conformity with the demands of distributive justice.[87]

I have thus shown how Brueggemann understands justice and how important it is in guiding his method of interpreting the Old Testament. My discussion on divine forgiving and punitive actions portrayed in the context of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes clarify the nature of divine justice, although not all questions about justice will be addressed or answered in this thesis.

4. Methodology: Canonical-Contextual-Theological Exegesis

In this section I will discuss the interpretative method I will employ in this thesis. I can summarize this method by saying that I will do an exegesis that is defined by three

[86] Of course, the legitimacy of the links that Brueggemann makes between justice and these various practices or features of his work may be questioned, but these are the kind of links that he wishes to make.
[87] This is Fretheim's concern with the "hardened" form of sovereignty that marks Brueggemann's God (1998: 34).

adjectives: canonical, contextual, and theological. The first term is the most basic and determinative of the three, because the canonical approach which I adopt here yields the understanding of what it means for my exegesis to be contextual and theological.

In referring to my approach as canonical, I draw from Brevard Childs, Christopher R. Seitz, and others who have advocated this approach to biblical interpretation and theology.[88] Since canonical interpretation has taken a variety of forms, I must clarify how I understand it. A canonical approach implies the following three distinctives. First, the only text that is relevant for theological exegesis is the final form of the text. This is so, because "revelation in the Old Testament cannot be abstracted from the form of witness that the historical community of Israel gave it."[89] Furthermore, since the final form of Scripture is the only form of the text that we have today, it is the only form of the text that does not involve undue speculation. Secondly, Scripture in its final canonical form is theologically relevant and normative for the believing Jew or Christian.[90] Scripture is not a purely historical or literary document, but a body of theological and religious writings that have been received by the believing community as normative. The nature of the canonical writings and traditional manner of reception implies a certain manner of reading them. Third, canonical interpretation of a text is carried out within the context of the whole

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[88] See my related comments and citations in section 2.3.3. Other proponents of a broadly canonical approach are Rendtorff (1993 and 1994) and Sanders (1972 and 1984). While I draw some helpful methodological points from Rendtorff (later in this section), I draw primarily from Childs' version of the canonical approach, especially as modified by Provan (1997) and Seitz (1998 and other sources). I also have considered other criticisms of Child's approach, such as those by Barr (1983: 75-104, 130-71). I disagree with most of Barr's criticisms of Childs, which Provan has largely refuted.

[89] Gowan 1994: xi, commenting on Brevard Childs' advocacy of theology.

[90] See especially the various works of Brevard Childs on these and other reasons for focusing on the canonical text. Moberly also offers several good literary and theological arguments for giving priority to the final form of the text (1983: 22ff).

collection of biblical books that are regarded as a canon. What is said in one part of the canon is theologically relevant to interpretation of other parts of the canon.

Beyond these three characteristics of the canonical approach, the approach taken in this thesis is not a highly-defined method. Rather, this approach is a self-consciously flexible and eclectic approach to interpretation. This is partly due the fact that there is no settled system of canonical interpretation in contemporary biblical scholarship.[91] In addition, the methodological eclecticism employed in this thesis draws from the distinct insights and methods of two different "sub-disciplines" within biblical studies that are relevant to canonical interpretation, namely, (1) the field of *theological* biblical interpretation and (2) the study of biblical *intertextuality*. It will become evident later that the manner in which I draw from these growing areas of research and writing is to give priority to the former. That is, I will investigate and refer to the phenomenon of biblical intertextuality not as an end in itself, but as what serves the theological exegesis of the canonical text. In addition, I will speak about both theological issues and intertextual issues in a way that is contextual.

Thus, out of a canonical approach as defined above, rises a commitment to exegesis that is both contextual and theological. I will explain what this means in three sub-sections. First, I will explain what I mean by canonical exegesis that is contextual and theological (4.1). Secondly, I will address my emphasis on the theological coherence of the canon, including an explanation of how certain phenomena of intertextuality relate to the issue of theological coherence (4.2). Lastly, I will address how my interpretative approach is marked by both theological realism and confessional commitment (4.3).

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[91] See Sanders (1972 and 1984), Childs (1992 and 1997), Rendtorff (1993 and 1994), Sailhamer (1995), Provan (1997), Seitz (1998), Miller (in his preface to Brueggemann 2000), and McConville (2001).

4.1. "Contextual and Theological Exegesis"

4.1.1. "Contextual Exegesis"

A literary and canonical approach implies contextual exegesis. A contextual exegesis pays close attention to the literary and canonical context of the text (in this case, Ex 34:6-7 or one of its echoes), rather than to historical-critical or diachronic context.[92] As such, my understanding of contextual exegesis draws from the literary approaches to interpretation that have emerged in the last several decades, especially those that are oriented to understanding the text itself (rather than to the reader).[93]

There are various levels of literary context: a sentence (the only level with which Brueggemann deals seriously in theory and practice), a paragraph or a unit, a book, a collection of books, and the whole of Old Testament canon.[94] The contextual exegesis of the text pays attention to the various levels of literary context to discern "literary" and "rhetorical" patterns in them. In so doing, a contextual exegesis also discerns theological patterns that tie the various levels of literary context (e.g. covenants in Genesis and Exodus reveal divine purpose for redemption). Theological patterns in turn provide a theological

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[92] I move further away from the diachronic approach than Childs, because I regard the historical-critical issues as generally irrelevant for theological exegesis or biblical theology (see Seitz 1998: 11f, 99, and *passim*). I focus on the text's own presentation of its "situation" (see below). In this regard, I come closer to the practice of Gowan (1994) and Fretheim (1991) in their theological commentaries on Exodus.

[93] Longman (1987) offers a helpful account of the various "literary" (rather than "historical") approaches in biblical scholarship that emerged in the 70's and has "exploded" in the subsequent decades. Trible (1994) provides an excellent account of "rhetorical criticism" (see especially her treatment in Chapter 2 of Muilenberg and his legacy). This thesis is sympathetic with the textually-based literary or rhetorical approach. Yet I have serious reservations about the deconstructionist and reader-response modes of literary or "rhetorical" criticism with which Brueggemann seems to have aligned himself.

[94] "Discourse analysis" or "structural analysis" (to be distinguished from "structuralism") has laid special attention to the structural features of literary context that extend beyond the sentence level (see Dorsey 1999). My consideration of Ex 34:6-7 in Chapter 2, for example, will involve the following levels of literary, canonical context: words ("steadfast-love") within a phrase ("steadfast love to thousands . . ."), a sentence (34:6-7), a pericope (33:12-34:9), a section (Ex 32-34), a book (Exodus), a collection of books (Pentateuch/Torah), and the Old Testament canon.

context in which to interpret the various levels of context (e.g. the breach of the covenant in Ex 32 and its renewal in Ex 34:10ff) and the text (e.g. Ex 34:6-7) in the context thus understood. The literary context thus includes *theological context*, the largely coherent theological patterns found within Scripture.

There are three features of literary context that are most relevant to my thesis. They are genre (and form), voice, and situation (setting and plot). A brief word on each of these is in order.[95]

My work presupposes the importance of correctly identifying the *genre* or form of the literary context in which the formula or echo is found. The unique feature of each text receives the exegetical (grammatical, syntactical, literary) attention appropriate to its genre. It is also important to identity the *form* of the more specific literary designation of the formula or echo. The form (e.g. Ex 34:6-7 as a divinely revealed theological generalization) is closely related to its content (list of divine attributes) and its unique function (a decisive solution to the problem of reconciliation between God and Israel).[96] I could make similar claims about the distinctive content, form, and function of the various echoes of the formula, as I will show in this dissertation.

The question of *voice* refers to who is speaking and to how they are speaking in the text. For the formula, one key question is whether the speaker that the narrator presents is divine or human. In Ex 34:6-7, the narrator would have the reader recognise God as the

[95] I will footnote how Brueggemann's work fails to attend to these features. See Fretheim's critique of Brueggemann in this regard (1998: 35f).

[96] Childs argues from the principles of form criticism that form and function are interdependent factors (1972: 51). I accept this and add "content" as a further factor, especially relevant in such theological texts as this one. Accordingly, the "meaning" of a text is bound to its form, and "meaning always contains a theological dimension" (Trible 1994: 26f).

speaker, speaking in the first person.[97] While an interpreter has access to the voice of LORD only through the testimony of Israel, Israel's testimony would have the interpreter read Ex 34:6-7 as divine self-revelation. Insofar as the other echoes quote or reuse the formula, then, the echoes continue to affirm the statements about who God is as revealed in Ex 34:6-7. The correct identification is important for correctly adjudicating any competing theological voices within a text (e.g. God's or a prophet's theological affirmations vs. Israel's sinful perspective).

The *situation* is the setting of a particular text. The setting the text itself assumes is straightforward in narratives like Ex 32-34 and Num 13-14. For example, the canon presents the narrative of Num 13-14 as an event that takes place chronologically after Ex 32-34. The settings of the texts of Isaiah and Nahum are discerned through the canon's presentation of the text and the text's references to its own situation. A text's setting is *primarily* defined by such a canonically and textually defined "situation." For example, the canon presents the text of Isa 53-54 as "a prophetic word of promise offered to Israel by the eighth-century prophet, Isaiah of Jerusalem."[98] Likewise, the book of Nahum speaks to the situation of coming judgment on Nineveh for its oppression. Thus, Isaiah and Nahum will be interpreted with such canonical "settings" in mind. Some important questions related to

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[97] Brueggemann's exegesis fails to make such distinctions and reduces all textual voices to the testimonies of Israel. The voice of Israel and the voice of God are blurred together, without clear internal distinction of the voices within Israel's testimony.

[98] Childs 1979: 325. Childs also points out that while historical critical scholarship argued that Isaiah 40ff was "originally addressed to Hebrew exiles in Babylon by an unnamed exilic prophet during the sixth century . . . the attempt to reconstruct [the original context] as a basis for exegesis has proven so unsatisfactory and hypothetical." The question of authorship and the date of composition—whether it is "Isaiah of Jerusalem" or "Isaiah of Babylon"—does not impinge upon the theological issues discussed in Chapter 4.

the situation are: Is it an individual or group situation? Who is the individual or group? Is it a time of peace or crisis?[99]

The "situation," then, is *the narrative setting, situation, or event described by the biblical text itself.*[100] I approach the "situation" *through* the literary, canonical setting, or situation. Therefore, I do not try to distinguish the narrated account of the text from allegedly "real" historical context. Hence, I give priority to internal "situational" data given by the text over the external data compiled by historical-critical research. Giving priority to internal data, however, does not prohibit me from occasionally making an effort to relate the internal references to setting to external historical references (as in the estimation of historical setting for the oracle of Nahum 1 in Chapter 5). External historical endeavour does not carry any independent significance for theology.

In my thesis, theological concerns remain consistently primary. The contextual exegesis is not an end in itself. Rather, the literary or rhetorical patterns of the text are regarded as tools for discerning the text's theological meaning.

4.1.2. "Theological Exegesis"

Since the biblical texts with which I am concerned are basically theological in character,[101] exegesis is "theological." Doing theological exegesis involves two

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[99] Brueggemann is often to be commended for attending to key features of the situation in his exegesis of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes. However, he sometimes leaves out crucial elements in his analysis of the situation, such as a due consideration of the events of human sins that precede the LORD's acts of forgiveness or punishment.

[100] The nature of what might be called the Bible's "historical witness," to the extent that there is one, varies greatly according to genre. This will be evident in the different ways I treat historical context in two Pentateuchal narratives (in Chapters 2 and 3) and in two very different kinds of prophetic oracles (in Chapters 4 and 5). It is sometimes difficult to know in regard to some narrative genres whether or not a text aims to be "historical" or not (as with Job or Jonah), but my method allows me to take the text's clues as to its "situation" seriously, without attempting to relate them definitively to extra-biblical historical data. The "historical situation" of a text given by its literary context can illuminate its intended theological meaning, even if one does not have extra-biblical reasons to regard it as historical.

[101] It is possible that all biblical texts are theological; see Knierim 1995: 60f; 67.

approaches: *doing exegesis for the service of theology, and doing theology for the service of exegesis.*

(1) Theological exegesis focusing on certain exegetical issues to the exclusion of others for the purpose of focusing on the theological issues imbedded in the text. Some aspects of exegesis, the grammar (philology, syntax) and (literary) context, are important exegetical tools that aid theological reading of the text. However, the "historical-critical" agenda largely is dead-ended theologically,[102] since it overly limits the notion of biblical meaning and interpretation.[103] The theological significance of the text sometimes goes beyond what either the original author or original readers would have understood, transcending the horizon of a single historical period.[104] Thus, I will assume with Walter Moberly that a theological reading of the Bible ought to be "taken as meaningful in itself" even when it involves laying aside questions of the origins and composition of the material.[105]

As such, theological exegesis does not contradict the basic principles of grammatical-contextual exegesis; i.e. the text is interpreted in keeping with its clearly known features of setting (or "situation"), grammatical structures and literary context.[106] Yet, theological exegesis and the various non-theological modes of interpretation

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[102] See Seitz 1998: 11f, 99 and *passim*. I do not wish to dismiss historical-critical issues as insignificant for all scholarly or interpretative purposes, but simply for mine.

[103] Cf. Childs 1974: ixf, where he stresses the need for a broader conception of exegesis than that which has prevailed in the modern period.

[104] In addition, the theological meaning and significance of a passage often is best understood in its overall canonical context, a larger understanding of context than what has typically prevailed in the theory and practice of historical-grammatical exegesis.

[105] Moberly 1983: 21. The attempt to uncover the "original" grammatical-historical sense according to the authorial intention and original hearer often involves a good amount of speculation, since there is no neutral or objective standpoint from which one may undertake such exegesis and the relevant data is often few and far between (see Childs 1974: xiii).

[106] Thus, contextual-theological exegesis utilizes grammatical-contextual exegesis, which recognises the temporal ordering within and between the texts as the canon presents them.

(rhetorical criticism, structural analysis, and intertextuality) are properly seen as inseparable and interrelated elements of the unified process of interpretation. More specifically, my use of various "non-theological" methods concentrates on *how they can shed light on the meaning of the final canonical form of the biblical text*, which typically has a theological dimension. The theological meaning of a text is therefore either a part of or an extension of the "plain" or "literal" sense of the text rather than being contradictory to it.

Thus, contextual-theological exegesis differs from those dogmatic or confessional versions of theological exegesis that take biblical texts out of context and use them as a springboard for concerns that are not evident in the text.[107] In my view, an emphasis on literary context does not need to work against, but rather highlight, literary or theological unity and coherence (within a given text, between texts, or within the canon as a whole). This point is important, because an emphasis on context is often regarded as yielding increased evidence for the diversity and even contradiction within the Old Testament's theological witness.[108]

(2) Theological exegesis seeks to attend to and accurately describe the key theological ideas that the text's own concerns and composition serve to highlight and clarify. Theological exegesis also assumes and emphasizes that the canonical text is marked by overall theological coherence and is organised in a way that emphasizes certain theological truths. Thus, theological exegesis (or simply exegesis) stands in a relationship

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[107] There is a sense in which my approach to biblical interpretation is "confessional" (4.3.1). Yet my approach is distinct from the traditional dogmatic or confessional approach in that I do not strive to bring the text to bear on concerns that are not "its own."

[108] Gowan's work on Exodus (1994), like mine, aims to (a) stress theological unity (ix) and (b) be contextual (xi). Gowan's concept of "context" extends beyond mine since it includes non-canonical literature and tradition (xiff). See 4.2 below for my more extensive considerations of textual and theological unity and coherence.

of mutual influence with Old Testament (biblical) theology.[109] Biblical theology should be grounded as much as possible in exegesis. And exegesis is to some extent based on certain biblical theological commitments. There is a kind of hermeneutical circle at work in which one must go from the general (biblical-theological assumptions) to the particular (exegesis of a specific passage) and from the particular back to the general.[110] That said, this study is concerned primarily with theological exegesis of particular passages.

4.2. Coherence in the Study of Biblical Texts

4.2.1. Drawing Attention to Coherence

Various expressions of modern "historical-critical" or diachronic approach to interpretation often have drawn attention to the theological diversity and theological contradiction that exist within the text.[111] In sharp contrast, the pre-critical approach tends to "harmonize" such diversity into a relatively unified viewpoint (coherence). To some extent, certain recent literary models of interpretation (e.g. discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and rhetorical criticism) have retrieved the pre-critical emphasis on the coherence of biblical texts as literary wholes and the intertextual relationships between various biblical texts (including those of differing genres). However, other literary modes of interpretation, such as those with deconstructionist sympathies (including Brueggemann)

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[109] See Knierim for a brief, but helpful explanation of the distinction between biblical exegesis (which he thinks is inevitably theological in character) and biblical theology (Knierim, 2000: 21-25). Insofar as I do "theology" it is *biblical* theology; and insofar as I do exegesis, it always includes a theological component. I will not refer to the post-biblical historical development or contemporary application of theological ideas (unlike Gowan 1994: x-xviii).

[110] See Sailhamer 1995: 18. Childs helpfully describes biblical theology as "an ancillary discipline that better serves in equipping the exegete for the real task of interpreting the biblical text itself" (2001: xii).

[111] In fact, the predominant and often uncritical tendency of people doing exegesis that claims to be "contextual" is to emphasize the diversity and tensions that exist within the biblical text. The manner in which I do contextual interpretation resists this tendency.

have counter-balanced the tendency to emphasize coherence by laying a strong emphasis on diversity, contradiction, incoherence, and incommensurability.[112]

In this thesis I wish to follow the literary approaches to the study of the Old Testament that emphasize coherence of biblical texts.[113] The approach taken here will be "post-critical" in that it attempts to avoid the "pre-critical" error of facile theological harmonisation of texts, which was often coupled with inattention to the distinct contexts of texts.[114] Thus, I will strive to employ the tools of modern biblical study to do careful contextual exegesis of a given passage (e.g. paying attention to its genre, voice, structure, and situation). I will strive to avoid imposing harmony or unity on the text if it is not there. I will not omit attention to glaring disharmony if it is there. That said, I would emphasize a unified or coherent theological perspective that the literary features of the context draws out. Also, in contrast to some recent literary approaches, I will focus on *theological* rather than purely literary harmony, though I will often take cues from the literary to establish the theological.

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[112] That the post-modern deconstructive approach is more radical is evident, for example, when critical scholarship's relatively "conservative" and "harmonizing" tendency with respect to the character of God (Fretheim 1984: 17ff) is compared with Brueggemann's radical approach.

[113] See Rendtorff's positive comments about the potential of using pre-critical Midrashic sources precisely because of their capacity to relate and unite texts that modern scholars would not think of relating (1993: 22ff). Moberly indicates that practitioners of recent literary methods tend to look for unity in the final form of the text, in contrast to those who use diachronic methods (1983: 22ff).

[114] Note that Calvin specifically entitled his commentaries on the Pentateuch *Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony.* In this way he broke from his usual (and more promising) book-by-book commentary format in the interests of theological harmonisation. I do not assume that Calvin or other pre-critical commentators consistently fell into the error of artificial external harmonisation. Sometimes they helpfully point out unifying features of the text (not reading into the text) that are neglected by modern interpreters.

There are three different levels or kinds of theological coherence that I am concerned to emphasize.[115] (These three levels of coherence correspond to three different levels of the literary context of an individual text, whether it is the formula or an echo).

(1) There is the intratextual coherence or harmony within a particular text (the formula or an echo).

(2) There is the intertextual or canonical coherence between (a) the formula's theological witness (regarding God's mercy and judgment) and (b) each echo's theological witness.

(3) There is the contextual coherence between (a) the theological witness of a small literary unit of a text (e.g. Ex 34:6-7) and (b) the larger literary context in which it is found (e.g. Ex 32-34 and possibly larger units).

My effort to discern intratextual, intertextual, and contextual coherence in the Old Testament involves three important methodological strategies, which I will explain in the remainder of this subsection: (1) giving attention to the literary form of "theological generalization," (2) using "intertextual" modes of theological interpretation, and (3) attending carefully to the question of what constitutes a theological contradiction.

4.2.2. The Form of a "Theological Generalization"

Especially since the development of form-criticism, Old Testament scholars have given great attention, often profitably, to the various forms or genres of the Old Testament literature.[116] I follow the scholarly emphasis on the "form" insofar as it is important for correctly identifying the "form" of Ex 34:6-7 and two of its echoes treated in this thesis (Num 14:8 and Nah 1:2-3). Following Fretheim, I identify their form as

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[115] See Sailhamer (1995: 205ff).

[116] The series *The Forms of the Old Testament Literature*, edited by Knierim and Tucker (for volume 1, see Coates 1983), represents a recent development and application of the form-critical approach. As with the methodology employed in this series, I usually begin with a structural analysis of a larger unit before I treat smaller texts and lay a general emphasis on literary context and genre.

"generalization."[117] More specifically, these texts are *theological* generalizations, because they make affirmations about the character of God.[118]

The very nature and function of a generalization in the Old Testament canon are to provide a basically coherent theological testimony—in the case of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes, a stable articulation of the character of God. The very process of canonisation would have rejected blatant contradictory generalizations on central issues such as the character of the LORD.[119] These factors are significant for the theological coherence between these texts. Their common form points in the direction of reading these texts in a similar way, except where other contextual considerations require otherwise.[120] Thus, unless exegetical factors urge me to think otherwise, the *form* of these texts inclines me to regard them as providing a stable theological meaning or content.

That said, I must note that Isa 53:5-12 ("servant song") and 54:7-10 ("divine oracle") do not share the same form of "theological generalization" with the formula and other echoes. Rather, the Isaiah echo-clusters represent applications of various terms of the formula first to the Servant (53:5-12) and then to the LORD (54:7-10). While Isaiah's echo-

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[117] Fretheim 1997: 16-18 (cf. 1991: 302 and 1984: 25f). Childs lends direct support to Fretheim's claims about generalising genres in the Old Testament (1992: 354ff). Also, Krašovec speaks of the formula in Ex 34:6-7 as "a generally accepted principle" (1999: 544; cf. 599) and elsewhere speaks of how "basic theological maxims did not change with the transmutation of traditions" (3). For more indirect support of this approach in regard to the formula and its echoes, see Scharbert 1957: 149-150.

[118] Brueggemann generally fails to attend to these "form-critical" designations and their significance.

[119] Goldingay 1987: 26ff.

[120] Fretheim (1997) sheds light on a properly contextual approach to the interpretation of these generalizations. He rightly regards them as standing in a complementary and inter-dependant relationship to another main theological form of the Old Testament, namely, story or narrative (see the citations in the previous footnote). By attending to generalizations about the abiding features of God's character and God's particular actions as portrayed in stories, one arrives at a clear biblical understanding of what God is like. Since the narrative genre forms the literary context for at least the text in Ex 34 and the echo in Num 14 (the context for the echoes in Is 53-54 and Nah 1 also contain "narrative" elements portraying what God does), I will be able to show the mutually-interpretative relationship between generalization and story in my exegetical practice.

clusters are different in form, the texts share many of the same items of vocabulary with the formula, establishing a striking intertextual relationship with the formula. The theological coherence between Isaiah's texts and the formula can be established on the basis of a specific relationship of intertextuality and other exegetical factors.

4.2.3. The Appeal to Intertextuality

In this thesis, I will participate in what might be called a post-critical retrieval of the pre-modern tendency to appeal to intertextuality in theological interpretation. By intertextuality, I refer specifically to *biblical* intertextuality, i.e. to the phenomenon of echoes, allusions, quotations, parallels, and reuses within the Bible itself.[121] I began to define some of these terms above (section 1.3), and I will now more fully elaborate on the manner in which I will appeal to these intertextual phenomena in this thesis. I focus my attention in this study on echoes, i.e. intentional or unintentional reuses of the formula in canonically later contexts. (See footnote 10.) As noted earlier, the intertextual relationship of the formula to the echoes treated in this thesis involves an asymmetrical relationship of priority between the formula and the echoes based upon canonical order. (See footnote 11.) This definition of intertextuality befits: (1) my choice to employ a canonical methodology that recognises the significance of canonical order and priority between texts, and (2) my choice to investigate the intertextual and theological issue of whether the canonically later texts reuse earlier texts in a theologically consistent manner.

Thus the specific intertextual phenomena I refer to in this thesis are distinct from other possible varieties of intertextual phenomena and therefore imply a certain way of using the terms "intertextual" and "intertextuality." Since the method of interpretation

[121] Sailhamer defines intertextuality as "the study of links between and among texts," rather than the study of links within texts, which is called intratextuality (1995: 213).

employed in this thesis is canonical, the understanding of intertextuality is necessarily shaped by a canonical approach to the text. This has implications for three issues: (1) the issue of intentionality, (2) the issue of priority, and (3) the issue of coherence.

(1) I am concerned with intertextuality in the sense of traceable instances of either intentional or unintentional reuses. Thus I do not require echoes to be the biblical author's intentional reuses of texts that came first historically.[122] Rather, I am referring to traceable instances of intertextuality that are either intentional or unintentional reuses.

One could object to this position by saying that my employment of the word "reuse" connotes authorial intentionality and related temporal or historical priority, i.e. it connotes a *conscious* reuse of a pre-existing text with a specific purpose in mind. Although that may be the most typical connotation of the word "reuse," it is not necessary to use it strictly in this manner. By "reuse" I refer to the occurrence (or use) of canonically earlier texts in canonically later texts. If one still wishes to speak of "intentionality" in canonical context, it is, in the words of Brevard Childs, "a 'canonical intentionality,' which is coextensive with the meaning of the biblical text."[123] In other words, the canonical placement of one text earlier than other texts that "repeat" it is hermeneutically significant in understanding their relationship and meaning.[124] Specifically, texts like Ex 34:6-7 that occur in the narratives of the Pentateuch or Torah are earlier in the canon because they are considered foundational for what comes later. In canonical context, echo texts occurring in the prophets are meant to draw on the foundational authority of texts that they echo from the

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[122] Sailhamer's definition of intertextuality does not include unintentional reuses, for he sees unintentional reuses as distorting the (author's intended) meaning of the text (1995: 213). See the similar perspective that guides the methodology of the intertextual studies of Isaiah by Wiley (1997) and Sommer (1998).

[123] Childs 1979: 79.

[124] The shapers and editors of the canon placed texts in a particular order for reasons that are discernable in the text itself (not in probing the history behind the text).

Torah. This gives the formula text a canonical priority over its echoes without requiring claims of historical or temporal priority, or authorial intentionality.

Thus I am focusing on a kind of intertextuality that stands between stricter and looser understandings of intertextuality, that is, between one that requires intentionality and one that places all texts on essentially the same level (no priority). As noted, some scholars wish to restrict biblical intertextuality strictly to relationships between earlier texts and intentional reuses of those texts. Such scholars could object to my approach to echoes by saying that allowing echoes to include unintentional reuses yields too many possible instances of intertextuality and is in danger of making intertextual phenomena untraceable. Put differently, without discerning authorial intention, one opens the door to endless claims of intertextuality based on subjective impressions. However, in response to this objection, I wish to point out that several objective factors guide my own identifications of intertextual phenomena. The strong echoes I study in this thesis require both literary and thematic correspondence to the base text. There is objectivity inherent in the discernment of an echo based on this criterion. Quotation, parallels, or other reproductions of vocabulary and syntax cannot simply be "made up." Even my identifications of weak (thematic) echoes are not merely subjective or arbitrary choices. To illustrate, identification of a thematic echo requires that it thematically correspond to the verbal features of the formula. It also requires the repetition of a complex and determinate pattern or situation in the literary-theological context of the echo. For example, the context of each of the echoes treated in this thesis is marked by the following three-fold situation: a group of people has sinned, divine judgment has either been threatened or exercised in response to that sin, and the LORD's merciful character or action is understood as lessening or governing that

judgment. The echoes treated in this thesis are therefore discerned by means of objective criteria.

Further, there are fewer potential pitfalls in working with a broader definition of intertextuality than working with a strict one. Definitions that restrict cases of intertextuality to those that can be shown to be intentional are extremely difficult to employ. They face the difficulty of discerning a biblical author's intention, a task which is complicated by the editing and redaction evident in many biblical texts as well as the process of canonization.[125] Furthermore, an "intention-oriented" definition risks missing a number of connections between texts that are highly theologically significant, but not likely intentional.[126]

(2) Although I do not wish to restrict my understanding of intertextual relationships to intentional ones, I do want to restrict it to relationships between texts that involve the *priority* of one text over another.[127] To be more specific, I understand this priority as temporal, but only in the sense of the canonical books' order (and their narrative world), rather than in historical terms that require making judgments on dating, authorship, and intentionality. Again, I am interested in tracing relationships between a text that occurs earlier in the canon (the formula) and other texts that occur later in the canon (the echoes). Therefore, my use of intertextuality stands in contrast to those definitions of intertextuality

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[125] Childs states that "basic to the canonical process is that those responsible for the actual editing of the text did their best to obscure their own identity" (Childs 1979: 78). This is just one factor that makes it difficult to speak of a specifically discernable authorial or editorial intention behind a certain echo—at least if that means anything other than the meaning of the text in its literary and canonical context.

[126] It is difficult to give a general definition of intertextuality that can sort out valid from invalid claims. Thus, any claims of intertextuality need to be sorted out on a case-by-case basis, according to the specific interpretative aims of a scholar.

[127] Fishbane 1985, Sharbert 1957, Trible 1978, and Krašovec 1999 all recognise the priority of Ex 34:6-7 and the dependency or derivative character of later texts.

that refer to intertextual relationships across biblical texts regardless of priority.[128] Even more obviously, the intertextuality in this thesis is different from the highly generalized and untraceable relations of intertextuality that postmodern literary theory ascribes to all human texts and language.[129]

(3) My view of intertextuality is also related to the question of the coherence of biblical texts with one another. In the pre-modern world, intertextual relationships between parallel texts were often used to confirm and demonstrate the internal theological coherence of Scripture. Yet, in recent critical and post-critical retrieval of concern for biblical intertextuality, many scholars emphasise the internal diversity of Scripture.[130] Accordingly, those drawing attention to intertextuality often focus on how later biblical texts expand, transform, or contradict the meaning of earlier texts.[131]

However, some scholars have emphasized the coherence of intertextual texts. Various synchronic modes of interpretation (including canonical approaches and some versions of literary and rhetorical criticism) have emphasized that the final form of the text shows evidence of a kind of interconnectivity between texts that stresses theological

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[128] For example, see Dozemann's treatment of how two texts interpret each other (Dozemann 1989).

[129] Soulen and Soulen point to two main kinds of intertextuality in their *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*: "As employed in contemporary literary theory and biblical studies, the term intertextuality ranges in reference from a general (and essentially untraceable) characteristic of all language to specific (and traceable) phenomena of language use" (2001: 87; cf. 88). The formula and echo relationships I refer to in this study are examples of the second kind of intertextuality, a specific and traceable phenomena.

[130] Postmodern literary theory also has a related emphasis on the indeterminacy of the meaning of biblical texts, which renders claims of coherence problematic. The diverse contexts of various texts, and the diversity of the interpreters coming from diverse literary-social contexts "provide the text with an inexhaustible number of potential and therefore indefinite meanings" (Soulen and Soulen 2001: 87).

[131] See Brueggemann 1997, Trible 1978, and, to some extent, Fishbane 1985. Among recent scholars of biblical intertextuality (especially Fishbane 1985), there has been a moderate stress on theological coherence. I believe this stress has often not been taken far enough or has been too hastily limited. Thus, Fishbane often believes that biblical writers were open to interpreting earlier biblical texts rather freely and without concern in being consistent with the literal sense of the base text. In particular, he sees an intertextual incoherence between Ex 34:6-7 and Nah 1:3 which I treat as intertextually coherent (e.g., 1985: 528ff, 536).

coherence. The intertextual phenomena that I study in this thesis tend to confirm the appropriateness of this emphasis. In this thesis I will show that the intertextual relationships between Exodus 34:6-7 and three of its echoes (i.e. a relationship between a text and its intentional or unintentional reuses or parallels) are marked by intertextual theological coherence (one of three forms of coherence discussed above). At least in this case, intertextuality within the Old Testament canon leads to a consistent or coherent theological witness about God's mercy and judgment, although I do not assume that this is always the case in respect to other texts and other theological issues.[132]

What does this imply about my method of interpreting intertextual phenomena? I will employ pre-modern methods of interpretation only in a highly qualified way, giving far more attention to context.[133] Yet, with pre-modern scholarship, I will retrieve something of the value of linking texts theologically with a view to their coherence. As such, my use of the forms of intertextuality mentioned within my theological exegesis can be understood as a "canonical" version of the classical Protestant hermeneutical rule that "Scripture interprets Scripture," especially when this rule is formulated in terms of letting the clearer

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[132] Towner's 1982 article on Rabbinic methods of interpretation stresses how the ancient Rabbis assumed that Scripture was completely consistent with itself (112). See also Rendtorff 1993: 22ff, on how such Rabbinic modes of interpretation may, with qualification, be fruitfully appropriated today.

In greater continuity with my view of the formula-echo relationship is the work of Krašovec, noted earlier. While he recognises change and diversity in the "reuse" (or, in his words, "exegesis") of earlier texts he says: "It is striking that the basic theological maxims did not change with the transmutation of traditions" (1999: 3). Later, Krašovec refers specifically to the formula of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes or repetitions: "It is obvious that the formula reflects a traditional belief about the essence of the divine character, and this is a central tenant of faith within the Old and New Testaments" (544; cf. 599).

[133] For example, I do not follow the early Rabbinic practice of inter-relating any texts that share the same word. Noticing the presence of the same word or words in different texts may be a helpful starting point for the consideration of whether they possess a significant intertextual theological relationship. However, other factors of correspondence would need to be uncovered before such a relationship is asserted.

passages interpret the less clear passages.[134] I call this a "canonical version" of this rule because I believe that the very process of canonization tended to eliminate theologically incompatible texts. Instead of an indefinite range of diversity or indeterminacy, there was a recognized and circumscribed range of theological meaning that was considered appropriate for canonicity (whether by religious leaders, editors, or redactors). Accordingly, the reader's job is not only to detect the diversity of texts implicit through contextual interpretation but to detect the coherence imbedded in the canonical text—even in relationships between texts found in diverse books or contexts. Again, the location of intertextual coherence of meaning is not first in the reader's mind, which is secondarily imposed on the text. Rather, the intertextual coherence of meaning is latent in the canonical text, and it is then discerned by the careful reader. The canonical approach I advocate, then, attends to the unity and coherence of intertextual relationships in the text, yet without ignoring the diversity of these texts or possibility that meaning may emerge, expand, or change as one text draws on another.[135] The understanding that some biblical intertextual relationships are marked by such coherence or continuity in meaning is

[134] Traditionally, the mutually-interpreting passages were drawn from the entire Christian canon. I am not opposed to this in principle, but in this thesis I will restrict myself to intertextuality occurring within the canon of the Old Testament.

[135] Although I wish to emphasize the dependence of later texts on earlier canonical texts, I recognize that in the canon the intertextual relationship is not strictly linear, with the earlier informing the later texts. There is a sense in which the meaning of the earlier texts are informed or enriched by later texts. Hays makes this point forcefully. He defines intertextuality as "the imbedding of fragments of an earlier text within a later one" in which later texts "depend on and transform the earlier" text (1989: 14). Hays goes on to make comments about Paul that would not apply directly to the writers of the echo-texts treated in this thesis, however: "Paul reads with imaginative freedom," wherein lies "the explosive revisionary possibilities" in "treating Scripture as a generative source for his own metaphorical *poiesis*" (1989: 45).

confirmed by the work of other scholars who have developed categories to account for such instances.[136]

4.2.4. The Question of "Theological Contradiction" in the Bible

I have noted at several points above how the interpretative approach of this thesis will emphasize the theological coherence of the texts I will consider. This raises the question of how I will handle the apparent theological contradictions in the Old Testament. In respect to Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes I will consider, the main question is whether there is a contradiction between the divine mercy and judgment in these texts. The question is whether an emphasis on theological unity or coherence overlooks genuine contradictions in favour of an *a priori* understanding that the text must be coherent in all cases.

To begin to address this question, I will point to the several distinct senses in which scholars commonly speak of "contradictions" in the Old Testament. John Goldingay notes four kinds of contradiction: formal, contextual, substantial, and fundamental.[137] He defines a *formal contradiction* as a "difference at the level of words that is not a difference at the level of substance."[138] A *contextual contradiction* is "a difference reflecting the variety in circumstances which different statements address" but in which one cannot say what the two speakers would say if they were confronting similar circumstances.[139] A *substantial contradiction* "involves a true divergence in viewpoint on the part of speakers whose disagreement is neither merely verbal [i.e. formal] nor merely contextual."[140] Such

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[136] Besides Krašovec (1999), Fitzmeyer (1961) identifies four types of quotations, in one of which (literal or historical category) the quotation is made without change in meaning, and in another (eschatological) there is no change in meaning, but rather a change in function.
[137] Goldingay 1987: 15-25.
[138] Goldingay 1987: 16. Goldingay gives the example of the biblical language of God changing his mind and not changing his mind.
[139] Goldingay 1987: 19.
[140] Goldingay 1987: 21.

contradictions involve two speakers who perceive and assess the same situation differently. Finally, a *fundamental contradiction* is a "disagreement which is a matter of substance and which indicates a basic disharmony" at the level of one's ethical and religious worldview.[141]

The question is which of these contradictions occur in the formula and in between the formula and its echoes. Brueggemann (1997) appears to agree that the Old Testament consistently displays a Yahweh-centred worldview (in opposition to other rival worldviews) and, in that sense, may avoid fundamental contradiction. Brueggemann's thesis of a disjunctive or contradictory rendering of Yahweh (based on his interpretation of Ex 34:6-7 and several of its echoes), however, implies that there are *substantial contradictions* at work between different "sides" of Yahweh. Phyllis Trible also appears to affirm that there are substantial contradictions between the formula and its various echoes. She comments that various hermeneutical moves are made in the echoes of the formula: "compression, displacement, additions, omissions, and irony."[142] So far I agree with Trible. However, Trible goes on to assert: "*What [Ex 34:6-7] says on one occasion, it denies on another.* Thus scripture in itself yields multiple interpretations of itself."[143] Brueggemann would concur with Trible's view and does in fact interpret the texts in question in a manner that would result in substantial contradictions.

In principle, I am not closed off to the possibility of contradictions occurring in the Bible; only actual exegesis can definitively determine what kind of contradictions are

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[141] Goldingay 1987: 24.
[142] Trible 1978: 4. Trible does not treat the relevant passages in detail, as Brueggemann does.
[143] Trible 1978: 4.

there.[144] Yet, my "canonical" understanding of the Old Testament and its theological authority lead me to hold the assumption that there will be none of what Goldingay calls fundamental contradictions in the Old Testament. In other words, even where there are significant formal, contextual, or substantial contradictions, the biblical texts share a worldview centred on the LORD in opposition to other gods. This implies that any substantial contradictions in the Old Testament will not concern matters fundamental to this religious worldview. In my view, such fundamental matters would include aspects of the LORD's character, including the basic elements of the relationship between the LORD's mercy and judgment. Two completely different conceptions of the same LORD—say, an exclusively merciful God and an exclusively judging God—represent what appears to be a fundamental, and not only a substantial, contradiction.

My exegesis of Ex 34:6-7 and three of its echoes will suggest, while some formal and especially contextual "contradictions" are apparent in these passages, there are not any substantial or fundamental contradictions at work in them. I will not comment on whether this is true for other echoes of Ex 34:6-7 not treated in this thesis, but I will show that there are no substantial or fundamental contradictions in the echoes treated.

4.3. The Relationship of the Text to Its Referent and Its Interpreters

In this final subsection on method, I want to pick up two "loose ends" that have not yet been treated adequately. Instead of focusing on the text itself, I will now discuss two

[144] Moberly (1983: 33) speaks of the possibility of *intended* theological paradox or contradiction in the Old Testament (an attempt to capture the rich mystery of God) as a possible explanation of apparent "contradiction." This may be important for Ex 34:6f and other texts. See also Goldingay's qualified affirmation of the appropriateness of looking for theological coherence in the Old Testament (1987: 25-28).

aspects of the larger hermeneutical situation, namely, the interpreter (or reader) of the text, and the theological referent of the text.[145]

4.3.1. The Relationship between Text and Its Interpreter, or the Role of Interpreter in Textual Interpretation

As already stated above, I join Brueggemann in rejecting the Enlightenment ideal of a neutral objectivity and detachment of the biblical interpreter. Some biases or interpretative perspectives, however, are more appropriate than others for the theological interpretation of the Old Testament. Along with Gowan, I believe that as a Christian interpreter a "hermeneutic of trust" is decidedly more appropriate than a "hermeneutic of suspicion" or scepticism.[146] This conviction is supported by the observation that the Old Testament is written by people of faith and solicits the readers' trust and allegiance to the God to whom it refers. The text therefore calls the reader to understand and evaluate Scripture from the perspective of faith. Truth is discerned, rather than created as a "readerly reality."[147] The text also calls the interpreter to humbly submit herself to the truth of the text and to the God to which it refers.[148]

For such reasons, theological interpretation taken up here is a "confessional" (rather than purely "descriptive") approach.[149] A confessional approach regards the church as the

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[145] I believe there are four main factors or aspects of the hermeneutical situation: the author/redactor, the text, the text's referent, and the interpreter/reader. I will not give significant attention to the first of these, mainly since I regard discussion of biblical author's and redactors (and their intention) as often highly speculative and thus unfruitful for methodological consideration.

[146] Gowan 1994: xiv.

[147] On this point, I differ with Brueggemann. I also disagree with his tendency to reduce Scripture's authority to human willingness to believe it to have such authority (1997: 206).

[148] See the comments and example of Karl Barth on the interpretation and use of Scripture. *Church Dogmatics* I/2: 715ff. Brueggemann considers Barth helpful in various respects but ultimately rejects him as falling into "fideism."

[149] Sailhamer writes: "According to the confessional approach, the task of Old Testament theology is to define the message of Old Testament theology within the context of one's own personal faith" (1995: 169). This formulation of the confessional approach is correct to a point but is in danger of being rather subjective and

primary interpretative community[150] (for the Jew it would appropriately be the synagogue[151]). Another hermeneutically significant, although secondary community—namely, the "academy" of biblical scholarship—also informs a confessional approach. Generally speaking, the claims of the church have priority over those of the academy—should the two come into conflict.[152] The "confessional" element is qualified by the recognition that the canonical text and its normative theological witness have authority over the reader and her confessional communities. The text, not the interpreter or her communities, is canonical.[153]

In taking up such a confessional approach, I recognise that people of faith have often offered false or oppressive interpretations of the Bible throughout Christian history. This, however, does not mean that all confessional approaches are to be rejected. Rather, it indicates the need to come back to the canonical text on a continual basis and to resist and revise reductionistic or oppressive interpretations of it. It also indicates the need to pay attention to the genuine insights and methodological tools of other approaches (e.g. historical, liberationist, or literary). Thus a balance needs to be kept between the confessional and non-confessional elements of interpretation. Yet if a Christian is to do a

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individualistic. It neglects reference to the confessional community to which the confessional interpreter belongs.

[150] I belong to the broad Christian ecclesial tradition of historic Protestantism, which is both evangelical and ecumenical. See Fackre (1993).

[151] I agree with Gowan's desire to treat Judaism (esp. Rabbinic Judaism) as a conversation partner who can lead the Christian to ever-new discoveries of the richness of the Old Testament (1994: xiff). Accordingly, I am sympathetic with Childs' comments in the preface of his new commentary on Isaiah, where he proposes a "fresh interpretative model that . . . proves to be illuminating in rendering a rich and coherent interpretation of the text as sacred scripture of *both church and synagogue*" (2001, xi; italics mine).

[152] My approach stands in contrast to Brueggemann's apparent desire to maintain an equal freedom from both ecclesial and academic claims (1997: 102-114, 743f). To clarify, I leave open the possibility that ecclesial interpretative claims may be wrong and that an academic approach or claim may help to uncover the error of the church. Of course, often there is no obvious conflict between the ecclesial and academic.

[153] Childs 1992: 71ff, where Childs critiques Brueggemann.

Christian (rather than secular) biblical interpretation, the "faithful" canonical reading needs to take priority over the others.[154]

4.3.2. The Relationship between the Text and the Referent: The Reality of God and God's Acts

In keeping with the hermeneutic of trust I have articulated above, I hold to a positive ontological (or metaphysical) belief about the relationship between the text and the reality of God. That is, trust in God and God's self-revelation most naturally leads one to believe that many biblical texts, including Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes, not only express Israel's rhetoric or Israel's beliefs about God, but also genuinely refer to God. Against Brueggemann's anti-realist rhetorical reductionism (see 3.2 above), the text makes real ontological claims about the text-independent reality of God.[155] In espousing this realist ontological way of reading the Old Testament, I side with Childs and virtually all other interpreters before the advent of post-modernity.[156] This view includes the notion that biblical texts are genuinely descriptive of the being, character, and acts of the LORD.[157] This relationship between the text and the reality of God calls for a textually-based method of

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[154] It seems that few if any scholars are genuinely "pluralistic" in the sense that their method equally emphasizes several approaches. Gillingham (1998) strives to be genuinely pluralistic in theory, but ends up prioritising the historical over the literary and theological. Brueggemann strives to be pluralistic, but reduces it to a dualistic reading that prioritises a socio-political and deconstructive approach over against the other options (see Levenson 2000 and my comments above).

[155] Gottwald notes that it is virtually impossible for Brueggemann, or anyone else, to completely avoid making "ontological claims" and that such an avoidance would run contrary to the Old Testament's own "proto-ontology" (Gottwald 1998: 14ff, 19ff).

[156] Brueggemann specifically faults Childs for referring to "'the reality of God' behind the text itself" (65). But the language of the Old Testament itself confirms that the Israelites really believed that the LORD existed independently of their rhetoric and that there was a realist relationship between their rhetoric (or their texts) and God's self. Thus, aspects of Israel's God-talk, such as the formula in Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes, are forever a resistance to the anti-realist, rhetorical approach of Brueggemann. (I thank Christopher Seitz for his unpublished comments about these matters.)

[157] In saying that these texts are "genuinely descriptive" of God, I do not mean to imply that they are (necessarily) "literally descriptive." I am sympathetic to the traditional understanding of God-talk as "analogy," a middle way between "univocal" and "equivocal" language. This allows biblical language about God to still be meaningful and "reality depicting," but with a due reverence for the unique mystery of God. As noted in section 3.1 above, this view is comparable to that of Karl Barth, which Hunsinger (1987) calls "hermeneutical realism."

theological exegesis aimed at drawing out what the text says about God.

It is therefore my conviction that Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes constitute a reliable and coherent "ontological" affirmation about what God is like. This does not mean, however, that the text's affirmations are to be taken in a literal manner, as one might take similar affirmations about human beings. The theological reason for this is that, according to the Old Testament, God is "holy" and thus "other" than humanity. The interpreter must be careful not to read human, sinful characteristics into divine characteristics. Yet one also finds implicit in the text a witness to a counterbalancing theme: God discloses himself to humanity in ways that humans can understand. This means that an interpreter can understand something of what God is like, although her understanding will always be incomplete and provisional. This is especially true where the terminologies of the attribute-formula are also used for humans in the Old Testament. An interpreter cannot read the text with an *a priori* conception of mercy, anger, forgiveness, punishment, judgment, or vengeance, and expect to grasp the nature of the God to which the text refers.[158] As far as the interpreter is concerned, the meaning of divine attributes must be derived from the text.[159]

I wish to close this chapter with a comment that clarifies the way in which the issue of "ontology" will bear on my argument in the remainder of the thesis. It will not impinge directly on my main argument about the meaning of the formula in Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes, an argument that could stand whether one took these texts simply as Israel's non-ontological rhetoric or testimony about God (as Brueggemann does) or as Israel's

[158] This is, I fear, what Brueggemann and many others have done—in effect imaging God in terms more appropriate to imaging fallen humanity. Indeed, Brueggemann's own programmatic emphasis on imagination gives him freedom and licence to do just that, and to neglect the textual and contextual clues that would point towards the uniqueness of the divine character and the relationship of mercy and judgment within that context.
[159] The great emphasis I give to literary context (including proper genre-recognition, discernment of structure and so on) is encouraged by the belief that the text genuinely refers to God and mediates (or constitutes) God's self-revelation. Context can be understood as part of the (divinely) ordered arrangement of the text so as to emphasize and illuminate the message and meaning of a text.

ontological testimony to the reality of God (as I do). Although I disagree with Brueggemann's purely "rhetorical" way of understanding these texts, I will engage with him on exegetical grounds—specifically how one should interpret what Israel says about God's acts and character in the biblical text, independent of the question of whether this talk of Israel actually refers to a God who is as Israel says he is. That said, in my own theological interpretation of these texts I will assume the legitimacy and superiority of such a realistic ontological way of understanding the force of the text. Therefore, I will treat the text straightforwardly as making real claims about a real God.

CHAPTER 2:

EXODUS 34:6-7

[6] וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה עַל־פָּנָיו
וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן
אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת׃
[7] נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים
נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה
וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה
פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים
עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים׃

[6] And he passed before Moses, proclaiming,
"The LORD, the LORD,[1] a God compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in steadfast covenant love and faithfulness, [2]
[7] keeping steadfast covenant love to thousands of generations,[3]
forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin.
Yet, not altogether clearing the guilty,[4]
he visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children
and the children's children, to the third or fourth generations."

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[1] The first "LORD" may be taken as the subject of the verb וַיִּקְרָא. LXX (and Num 14:18) has only one "LORD" (κύριος). Walker (1960: 277) suggests that YHWH is an Egyptian verbal form meaning I AM, proposing the translation "I am I AM" or "I am YAHWEH." For Margaliot (1994: 49), "they are not a noun clause ('The LORD is the LORD')," nor an *idem per idem*. They are not "vocative, Moses calling the name of the LORD" or the LORD proclaiming his own name. Margaliot is also unwilling to amend the text after the LXX or Num 14:18 "which read only one divine name." Margaliot's suggestion is to keep the two consecutive divine names and give the interpretation that they "indicate that there exists no division within his divinity"; "The God who is compassionate and gracious etc. is the same God who does not remit punishment."

[2] LXX has adjectives πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινὸς "merciful and truthful" for חֶסֶד and אֱמֶת. Gowan (1994: 236) says there are places where the terms are "better translated as grace or mercy or kindness or loyalty," but he does not supply the references.

[3] "Generations" is added in view of the explicit "thousands of generations" in Deut 7:9. "Generations" also added after "third and fourth" for parallelism.

[4] Literally, "acquitting not acquitting." Additional textual and translational notes for Ex 34:6-7 are provided below in the exegetical section.

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Chapter and Its Argument

In this chapter, I will interpret Exodus 34:6-7, which, from a canonical perspective, is the "mother" text that is echoed in other parts of the Bible. I will interpret Ex 34:6-7 theologically in its literary-theological context with the goal of understanding the following two main issues: (1) What can be said about the meaning of the divine attributes as found in Ex 34: 6-7 given the narrative context of Ex 32-34? (2) How do divine mercy and judgment relate to each other in this passage? As I answer these questions, I will engage with Walter Brueggemann.

In section 1, I will first state the problem to be addressed. In section 2, I will discuss the canonical, literary theological context of Ex 34:6-7. This will involve summarizing the relevant themes from the text's canonical context (from Genesis 12-50 and Exodus) and describing key aspects of its immediate narrative context in Ex 32-34. I will highlight those elements that are especially important for my understanding of the divine attributes of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes.

In section 3, I will discuss several correspondences in Ex 33:12-34:5 that foreshadow and illuminate the meaning of the attributes of the LORD (יְהוָה) revealed in Ex 34:6-7. I will first examine the terminological correspondences within Ex 33:12-23 along with the correspondences within and between the two self-revelations in Ex 33:19 and 34:6-7. I will then show the theological significance of such correspondences. In the course of this section and the next, I will seek to correct the dichotomous conceptualisation of divine judgment and mercy or of divine sovereignty and freedom found in scholars like Brueggemann.

In section 4, by a phrase-by-phrase exegesis of Ex 34:6-7, I will analyse the meaning of each attribute and its function in the narrative context of 32-34. Finally, in section 5, I will conclude by summarizing the key points of this chapter.

1.2. Problem Stated: Brueggemann on Exodus 34:6-7

Brueggemann starts with the assertion that Ex 34:6-7 is an accumulation of "Israel's preferred adjectives for Yahweh" (215) (even though they are in fact a combination of adjectival and verbal forms). Brueggemann states that this is a generalisation or "normative statement" of God's character "that depends on and gathers together the claims of the verbal recitals that are much more concrete" (216). This assertion about the eclectic and dependent nature of Ex 34:6-7 would appear to give Brueggemann a warrant to import the perceived meaning of certain terms (from other passages) to influence either positively or negatively the interpretation of the terms in a given text. The end result of this is that Brueggemann fails to allow the narrative context (32-34) of Ex 34:6-7 to significantly or primarily bear on its interpretation. I will now give a critical summary of his interpretation of Ex 34:6-7 and the echoes in question.

Brueggemann claims Ex 34:6-7 is a juxtaposition of two contradictory witnesses to God's dual character, the positive merciful side (34:6-7a) and the negative judging side (7b). The positive side has to do with "Yahweh's will to be related to Israel in faithful, generous, and reliable ways" (269f). The negative side is about a "God who will act abrasively to maintain sovereignty against any who challenge or disregard that sovereignty" (270). Brueggemann interprets one side at a time in isolation from the other. Thus, right from the outset, Brueggemann presupposes bipolarity or dualism in the text and of divine character and is not interested in exploring the possibility of a harmonious relationship between the so-called "two sides" of the formula.

Brueggemann posits what Goldingay might call "substantial contradiction"[5] between the "two sides" of the formula. Thus, Brueggemann comments that the first half (34:6-7a) of the formula speaks of

> Yahweh's intense solidarity with and commitment to those to whom Yahweh is bound. The generalizing adjectives assert, *on the basis of verbal*

[5] Goldingay 1987: 21.

> *sentences of testimony such as Psalm 136*, that Yahweh's life with Israel is marked by a fundamental, inalienable loyalty (217; italics mine).

The "second half of the formulation bears witness to something potentially wild, unruly, and dangerous in Yahweh's life" (271). Especially in light of the echo in Nah 1:3, Brueggemann sees divine judgment as potentially being "undisciplined and well beyond the enactment of sanctions" (271). Here Brueggemann supports his view that there is a substantial contradiction within Ex 34:6-7 by drawing attention to other biblical passages that emphasize one or the other of the "two sides" of Yahweh. Brueggemann reads 34:6-7a in light of Ps 136 to support the "positive side" of Yahweh; he reads 34:7b in light of Nah 1 to support the extremely "negative side" of Yahweh. Having done that, Brueggemann draws the conclusion that:

> [7b] alerts Israel to the reality that Yahweh's full character is not subsumed under Yahweh's commitment to Israel in solidarity. There is something in Yahweh's sovereign rule—Yahweh's own self-seriousness—that is not compromised or conceded, even in the practice of solidarity (218).

That sovereignty is not subsumed under solidarity means that sovereignty and solidarity are "in profound tension with each other, and... finally they contradict each other" (227). "These two inclinations of Yahweh are not fully harmonized here [Ex 34:6-7], and perhaps never are anywhere in the Old Testament" (227).[6] He then goes on to say, "if we take these statements as serious theological disclosures, then the tension or contradiction here voiced is present in the very life and character of Yahweh" (227).[7]

The reason for divine self-contradiction is to be found in conflicting interests that God has, for himself and for Israel, or put differently, self-interest and other-interest. Thus, Brueggemann says:

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[6] Brueggemann elsewhere (1997: 270) makes an apparently contradictory claim: "On most occasions, the sovereign power and the gracious solidarity of Yahweh go nicely together. But when they do not, we arrive at Israel's most acute awareness of Yahweh and Israel's oddest theological testimony." In either case, what is emphasized is divine sovereignty.

[7] While Brueggemann claims to steer clear away from ontological language, this sounds like an ontological statement and not merely a description of Israel's rhetoric (see Chapter 1, subsections 3.1 and 4.3).

> The tension or contradiction is that Yahweh is for Israel (or more generally "for us," *pro nobis*) in fidelity, and at the same time Yahweh is intensely and fiercely for Yahweh's own self (227).

The never resolved inner conflict of Yahweh naturally means "there is a profound, unresolved ambiguity in Yahweh's life" (271).

> As a consequence, in any moment of Yahweh's life with Israel, Yahweh has available more than one alternative response to Israel, and Israel is never fully, finally certain of Yahweh's inclination toward it (227).

Brueggemann says:

> This means that Israel's relationship with Yahweh is one of heavily freighted possibility. Yahweh may *act in any circumstance in gracious fidelity*, and often does. And Yahweh may *act in any circumstance in ferocious sovereignty*, and sometimes does, sometimes on behalf of Israel and sometimes against Israel. The affirmation of Yahweh's sovereignty is endlessly unsettling and problematic (271; italics mine).

In Brueggemann, Yahweh's sovereignty is equated with judgment and punishment (34:7b), and solidarity is equated with grace, love, forgiveness, and patience (34:6-7a). Punishment is construed as an act of God's uncompromising sovereignty, arising out of excessive divine self-regard. Such punishment, it is thought, sometimes goes beyond the bounds of justice by expressing itself as uncontrolled vengeance. Forgiveness, by contrast, is an act of God's solidarity with God's people, arising out of God's faithfulness and mercy. As such, forgiveness sometimes is understood as the complete removal of human responsibility before God that ignores the demands of God's righteousness or justice.

Thus, Brueggemann insists that God's mercy and judgment exist in extreme tension and are never satisfactorily harmonized (227). When they are resolved, it is in God's righteousness. This seems to imply that God's mercy and judgment are often expressed in unrighteousness, since Brueggemann claims that God's mercy and judgment are never fully harmonized. Thus Brueggemann posits a view of God's judgment that at times has nothing to do with God's mercy as in Num 14 or Nah 1. At such a time, God is completely and solely consumed by what Brueggemann calls "Yahweh's own self-seriousness" (218).

Conversely, Yahweh is sometimes completely forgiving, failing to hold people accountable or to motivate them to live justly. In Ex 34, Yahweh is completely forgiving, and the threat of v.7b is not mobilised at all in that context. The psalms provide other examples in which the positive side of Yahweh's character is celebrated or mobilised while the negative side is virtually ignored. In this way, Brueggemann claims the two contradictory "options are worked out in extremis in Israel's narrative life" (225). Yahweh's act (whether of mercy or judgment) can be arbitrary, unjust and undisciplined.

Certainly the formula itself already raises the question of how mercy and judgment relate to each other, and whether they are compatible. In Ex 34:6-7a, the mercy of God is abundantly emphasized. Then in v.7b there is a clear statement about the vengeance of God. It says, God will "not acquit the guilty altogether" but will "avenge the sins of the fathers." On the face of it, there does seem to be a tension between two parts of the formula. However, it appears that Brueggemann's effort to be sensitive to the diversity of the Old Testament's view of God has led him to overstate this diversity and its implications. This is true in his treatment of Ex 34:6f and its echoes. Accordingly, he tends to overlook the biblical text's own witness to the compatibility and integration of the various aspects of divine character. This is what I hope to show when I examine Ex 34:6-7 closely in its context in 32-34, to which now I turn.

2. Canonical, Literary Theological Context of Exodus 34:6-7

2.1. Canonical Context of Genesis and Exodus

Childs has proposed the literary unity of the Pentateuch based on the canonical shaping and function of the Pentateuch.[8] In particular, Childs notes that there is a close tie

[8] Childs (1979: 128-135) adopts and summarizes Sanders' point (19720): "the formation of a Pentateuch established the parameters of Israel's understanding of its faith as Torah. For the biblical editors the first five books constituted the grounds of Israel's life under God and provided a critical norm of how the Mosaic tradition was to be understood by the covenant people. The fundamental theological understanding of God's redemptive work through law and grace, promise and fulfilment, election and obedience was once for all established." Childs also draws attention to Rendtorff's view (1977) that "The final form of the Pentateuch,

between the book of Genesis (especially chapters 12-50) and the book of Exodus. As Childs states, the promise to the patriarchs is presented "in such a way as to point to the future."[9] Indeed, Exodus begins with the affirmation that the LORD has indeed fulfilled his promise of innumerable descendents (Ex 1:7, 9) and with the anticipation of the fulfilment of the promise of deliverance from the land of slavery and entry into the promised land (Gen 15:13-16; Ex 3:6-9). Thus, Genesis in its final form functions "as the introduction to the story of Israel which begins in Exodus."[10]

A canonical approach to Ex 34:6-7, then, takes seriously the patriarchal narratives of Genesis as a proper literary and theological context for the interpretation of Ex 34:6-7. This is so especially since Ex 32-34, the immediate context of Ex 34:6-7, repeatedly refers to the promise to the Patriarchs concerning the multiplication of descendants and the possession of a land (Ex 32:13, 34; 33:1-3; 34:11).

A canonical approach to Ex 34:6-7 also takes seriously the passage's context provided by the book of Exodus. (1) The narratives of Israel's oppression in and deliverance from Egypt function to give the exodus community a profound and indelible experience of the unique nature and power of the God of their ancestors (1:8-15:21). This is a God who is faithful and powerful to keep his promises. This is a God who has a supreme power over creation. This is a God who is above all gods (the gods of Egypt and of Pharaoh the god-king) and who will judge all gods and their worshippers. This is a God whose judgment has saving purposes. This is a God who desires worship not only from Abraham's descendants, but also from all the earth from generations to generations. This is truly a unique God. To turn away from such a God would indeed be a fatal mistake.

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which cannot be simply derived from the combination of literary sources, gives evidence of a canonical reading of the whole in its final state of editing. The various parts were more closely united by means of cross-references, either to the promises of the past or to an anticipation of the future."

[9] Childs (1979: 130) points out, "the promise of posterity and a land" is "the continuing thread which ties together the material."

[10] Childs 1979: 130. Indeed, "Genesis closes with the death of the last patriarch" (Childs 1979:129) who had migrated to Egypt with the seventy of his family (Gen 46-50); Exodus begins with the reminder of the last patriarch's migration to Egypt and the indication that his family has become exceedingly numerous (Ex 1:7).

(2) The narratives of the journey in the wilderness demonstrate how the unique God of Israel will uniquely test Israel's heart through hardships such as hunger and thirst (15:22-17:7). In view of the LORD's demonstration of his power and character in Egypt, the Israelites are tested to see if they will trust the LORD when there is a great need. Later at Sinai, in Moses' forty-day absence (24:18; 32:1), the Israelites are (in effect) tested to see if they will remain faithful to the LORD.

(3) The narrative of the making of the covenant at Mt Sinai provides an understanding of God's nature that reveals God's grace. As Childs rightly stresses, the making of the covenant is placed between the narratives of Israel's rebellion in the wilderness (Ex 15-17) and at Mt Sinai (Ex 32). Such a placement gives emphasis to divine grace. That the covenant is made not with an ideal Israel but with a rebellious one is a witness to the LORD's unmatched love.[11] It is within that context that God makes demands for Israel's covenantal love.

(4) The narrative of the making of the covenant at Mt Sinai provides another important aspect of the theological background for a theological exegesis of Ex 34:6-7: the role of divine holiness in relation to Israel's identity and mission. In Ex 19, a holy God elects Israel as a holy nation and gives Israel the mission of being a kingdom of priests to other nations. The structure of the Sinai material (Ex 19-40) shows that Israel's identity and mission are intricately related to obedience to covenant law and proper worship of God. The covenant law is integrated into the making of the covenant and the building of the tabernacle immediately follows the making of the covenant.[12] Israel's rebellion at Sinai, which is placed between the instruction for the tabernacle (Ex 25-31) and the building of the tabernacle (35-40), therefore needs to be understood in relation to God's holiness and Israel's identity and mission given by a holy God.

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[11] See Childs 1979: 175-176.

[12] The covenant law and the instructions on the tabernacle show that through obedient life and proper worship of God, Israel can maintain the holiness that is imperative for fulfilling its mission to the nations.

Some of these themes will be further developed in the exegetical section.

2.2. A Brief Structural Analysis of Exodus 32:1-34:28

A. The fall of Israel (32:1-6)
B. The effects of the fall (32:7-33:11)
  1. The LORD's initial response and Moses' intercession (32:7-14)
    a. Destruction of Israel threatened (32:7-10)
    b. Moses' intercession (32:11-13)
    c. The LORD's change of mind (32:14)
  2. Moses' descent from Mt Sinai and various punishments (32:15-29)
    a. Moses' breaking of the tablets (32:15-19)
    b. The Israelites' drinking of the water with the powdered image (32:20-21)
    c. The Levites' zeal and death of 3000 Israelites (32:22-29)
  3. Moses' ascent to Mt Sinai and his unsuccessful intercession (32:30-34)
  4. A plague and the command to leave Sinai without the LORD (32:35-33:6)
  5. Moses and the LORD in the tent outside the camp (33:7-11)
C. The resolution of the incident (33:12-34:28)
  1. Moses' third intercession and the LORD's promises to reveal his name (33:12-23)
  2. Moses' ascent to Mt Sinai and the LORD's revelation of divine attributes (34:1-7)
  3. The final intercession of Moses and the renewal of the covenant (34:8-28)

2.3. Brief Overview of Exodus 32:1-34:28

The narrative context, in which the divine self-revelation in Ex 34:6-7 is found, is the story of the golden calf and its aftermath in Ex 32-34. Terence E. Fretheim appropriately calls the story of these chapters "the fall story of Israel."[13] Crucial themes in this narrative are not only divine mercy and self-revelation, but also the *sin* of Israel. Therefore, the understanding of the nature and significance of God's revelation of mercy can be obtained only against the backdrop of an understanding of the nature, significance, and gravity of Israel's sin. Brueggemann rightly recognises that Israel's idolatry is an "unparalleled affront to the LORD,"[14] but he fails to interpret divine judgment and punishment *in light of* Israel's flagrant sin. To understand how divine mercy and punishment are actually related in Ex 34:6-7, the grave reality of Israel's sin must be fully integrated into the discussion of Ex 34:6-7. I will do so in the following discussions.

[13] Fretheim 1991: 279. Moberly (1983: 79) says, "The making of the calf may be described as Israel's first sin."
[14] Brueggemann 1997: 216.

Exodus 34:6-7 occurs at a moment of crisis in the history of Israel's relationship with God. As the narrative relates, Israel has just made and worshipped the golden calf (Ex 32).[15] What precedes this rebellion in Exodus accentuates the gravity of Israel's sin, namely, the LORD's demonstration of his supremacy in power in Egypt: the astounding provision in the wilderness and the profound experience of seeing and hearing God in theophany in Mt Sinai.[16] The Decalogue given by the LORD on Sinai further underscores Israel's wilful rebellion. Israel emphatically violated the first two commandments by making and worshipping an idol.[17] The Israelites eagerly returned to the idolatry they once knew in Egypt.[18]

Israel thereby rejected the LORD, the covenant with the LORD, and their calling and mission to be the LORD's "treasured possession" and "a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (19:5-6). There was now "a complete rupture of the covenant relationship."[19]

In the second and third commandments of the Decalogue, the LORD promised that judgment and punishment would fall upon idolaters and abusers of the divine name. Accordingly, God now intends to destroy Israel for breaking the covenant in such a manner (32:10). But instead of taking immediate action, the LORD discloses his plans to Moses in Ex 32:7ff, which is consistent with the LORD's character displayed in his interaction with Abraham.[20] The LORD discloses his intention to destroy the Israelites who are "corrupted" (שִׁחֵת, v.7) and "stiff-necked" (קְשֵׁה־עֹרֶף, v.9). As Donald E. Gowan points out, the word "corrupted" is the one used to describe the earth and all "flesh" before the judgment by the

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[15] For a discussion on the nature of the golden calf as an idol, what it might represent or symbolise, see the detailed discussion in Moberly (1983: 46-48). See also Gowan 1994: 219-225.

[16] See Greenberg 1960: 273ff for his discussion on the purpose of the theophany on Mt Sinai.

[17] Moberly 1983: 49; Gowan 1994: 221.

[18] Clements 1972: 205.

[19] Gowan 1994: 218. Moses' breaking of the tablets powerfully symbolises Israel's breaking of the covenant, which is renewed by God in Ex 34. Cf. Hyatt 1971: 307.

[20] The LORD's "consultation" with Moses is consistent with the LORD's election of Abraham and his descendants to be the instrument of God's blessing to all nations (Gen 12:2-3). The LORD desires to be in partnership with Israel or its representative, such as Moses. The facts of divine *election* of and *covenant* with Abraham and his descendants seem to account for why Abraham is treated differently than Noah who is not consulted prior to the flood.

flood.[21] The Israelites are also described as "a stiff-necked people" (עַם־קְשֵׁה־עֹרֶף, v.9) for they made conscious choice to rebel against the LORD. Then the LORD tells Moses, "Let me alone" (הַנִּיחָה לִי)[22] so that "my anger may burn" (וְיִחַר־אַפִּי) against them in v.10. The LORD threatens to destroy the entire wicked nation and proposes to "start over" with one righteous man Moses.[23] But in response to Moses' intercession,[24] God "repents" (וַיִּנָּחֶם, v.14)[25] of his threat to bring a total destruction on Israel.[26] But this does not mean the sinners go entirely unpunished. Divine mercy to his covenant people nonetheless assumes the appropriateness of divine anger and its *controlled* expression in divine punishment upon them.[27] Thus the LORD *partially* punishes the nation both directly and indirectly.[28] The LORD punishes the people indirectly through the zeal and sword of the Levites who kill 3000 people (v.26-29).[29] Moses attempts to make atonement (אֲכַפְּרָה בְּעַד חַטַּאתְכֶם, v.30) for Israel but fails (v.30-35).[30] The LORD responds with a postponement of punishment[31] and further discipline of Israel with a plague (v.34f.).[32]

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[21] Gowan 1994: 222.

[22] Gowan (1994: 223) points out, "The word is a hifil imperative of the root *nuah*, which means to let something lie in a place, to leave behind, to let something remain, to allow something to happen, or, in five occurrences, all in the imperative, to let someone alone." Milgrom (1990: xxxix) insightfully remarks, "by asking Moses not to intercede, God as much as admits that prophetic intercession is effective" (v.15). Milgrom adds that God even "seems to be hinting to Moses . . . that he should intercede if he wants to save Israel." Fretheim 1991: 284, comments that the phrase "may well refer to the isolation desired to suffer grief."

[23] Gowan 1994: 221.

[24] Fretheim (1991: 285) points out that Moses' intercession involves "an appeal to God's reasonableness," "an appeal to God's reputation," and "a reminder of God's own promise."

[25] Hyatt (1971: 307) points out that נחם *nifal* means, "'change one's mind or purpose.' Not infrequently in the OT Yahweh is said to repent. See especially Jer 18:5-11, where it is said that Yahweh may 'repent' either of intended evil or of intended good, in response to the action of the people . . . to their needs and to their attitudes and actions." Fretheim (1991: 286) makes an important distinction between repentance as "the reversal of a direction taken or a decision made," which God does, and repentance from sin, which is never associated with God in the Old Testament.

[26] Gowan (1994: 222) remarks that God "will change his plans as a result of human intervention, and more than that; he indicates that he has subjected himself to some extent to the will of Moses."

[27] Fretheim (1991: 287) draws an important contrast between divine patience displayed in not letting his anger "burn hot" (v.10-11) and Moses' impatience displayed in letting his anger "burn hot" and shattering the tablets (v.19). Human impatience further emphasizes divine patience.

[28] Moberly (1983: 59) rightly points out, "given the divine-human balance in the narrative, there need be no problem in the fact of judgment administered through both divine and human agency."

[29] This is to bring order to an anarchic people who are "running wild," as Fretheim puts it (1991: 288).

[30] For a more detailed discussion on Moses' attempt to make atonement, see below (4.5).

But the problem of Israel's sin is not yet resolved. The reason is that there is no appropriate means of *atonement* (כפר) for Israel's sin. The atoning sacrificial system would not encompass this kind of outright rebellion against and rejection of the LORD.[33] In addition, the LORD did not accept Moses' attempt at atonement as the one righteous man in Israel. Therefore, the destruction of Israel remains a real possibility; indeed, it is very likely.[34]

Perhaps to avoid the need to destroy them, the LORD announces that he will withdraw his presence from Israel (33:3)[35] and send an "angel" (מַלְאָךְ, v.2) ahead of Israel instead.[36] But this option is not entirely satisfactory either to God or Moses. Thus, the LORD takes the temporary measure of visibly moving and staying outside the camp of Israel to reconsider Israel's future. A tent is pitched outside the camp, serving as a meeting place.[37] There Moses talks with the LORD "face to face" (פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים, v.11), and the

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[31] It seem, that 32:34 is a postponement of punishment in view of the statement the LORD makes in Num 14 (see below).

[32] Milgrom (1990: xxxix) makes a comment that aptly applies here: Moses "can only avert punishment; he cannot expunge the sin. Sin remains suspended over the heads of the sinners, capable of exacting retribution at a future date. Thus Moses' intercession mitigates or postpones the punishment, but it does not abolish it."

[33] Israel is later instructed to build the tabernacle along with its furnishings and ark. These holy things were to serve as (1) meeting places between God and Israel (or a priestly representative of Israel), (2) visual symbols of God's continuous guidance of Israel into the promised land, and (3) means and places of atonement for sin. None of these holy things had yet been built in Ex 32-34. See Moberly 1983: 62; Childs 1974: 537.

[34] Moberly 1983: 76.

[35] The motivation behind this decision is to preserve Israel rather than to further punish them. Sarna (1991: 211) calls it a "merciful preventive measure." Fretheim (1991: 294) rightly states, "God does not want to be confronted with an occasion to exercise the divine wrath. This is a marvellous picture of divine reluctance!" Davies (1967: 238) however, takes the announcement of divine presence as a part of punishment mentioned in 32:34. Davies suggests translating וְאֵדְעָה מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה־לָּךְ of 33:5 as "I may know what I am to make for you," and suggests that "what I am to make" refers to the ark that is to substitute for the accompanying presence of the LORD.

[36] In Ex 14:19; 23:20; 32:34, "my angel" is identified with the LORD, or with the LORD's accompanying presence. Fretheim (1991: 293) rejects a univocal understanding of the divine presence and suggests a distinction between different types of divine presence. He says, "At the two ends of a continuum are God's general presence in the world and God's intensified presence in theophany. Along that continuum are God's accompanying presence with the people and God's tabernacling presence." Against this view, Davies (1967: 239) suggests that the LORD will still travel with Israel but *outside* the camp instead of *among* the people to show the LORD's displeasure.

[37] The "tent" is best understood as a private one, since the tabernacle has not yet been constructed at this point in the narrative.

two enjoy close communion with each other. In this context, the LORD raises the issue of bringing Israel into the promised land (Ex 33:12). Moses presses the LORD to accompany Israel to the promised land and guarantee it by the revelation of God's "way" (דַּרְכֶּךָ, v.13b)[38] and "glory" (כְּבֹדֶךָ, v.18). God responds favourably to these requests, promising to accompany Israel to the land ("My presence פָּנַי will go with you"—v.14) and to show all of divine "goodness" (כָּל־טוּבִי, v.19). The LORD subsequently gives Moses a powerful self-revelation of the LORD's character in Ex 34:6-7.[39] Following the LORD's self-revelation of his goodness, Moses makes his final intercession for Israel. And as Childs says, "the God who now makes himself known...as the God of mercy and judgment makes good his claim by forgiving his sinful people."[40] Thus, the LORD grants reconciliation and renewal of the covenant (v.10ff).

Indeed the LORD, who is a compassionate and gracious God, is the only one who in his freedom can and does reconcile Israel to himself. The LORD reinstates Israel as God's "inheritance" (וְנַחֲלָתָנוּ, v.9),[41] renews the covenant with Israel (v.10, 27), and appropriately warns against further apostasy.[42] Hence, the theological problem raised by the narrative of how God can be present with a sinful people without destroying them finds its resolution in the LORD's self-revelation of his divine character (33:19; 34:6-7).[43]

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[38] Note that the Hebrew is singular.

[39] The view reflected here is that the LORD is the one who calls on the name of the LORD and proclaims the "attributes" in 34:6-7 as a fulfilment of 33:19. The LORD himself calls upon the Name of the LORD as an act of self-disclosure. So also Hyatt 1971: 322; Childs 1974: 611.

[40] Childs 1974: 612.

[41] The request, "See that this nation is your people," is especially significant. Asking God to see Israel as the LORD's people is essentially a prayer for the LORD to give an unparalleled manifestation of grace by forgiving Israel's sin.

[42] When the LORD makes the covenant, he reiterates some fundamental laws that are principally for Israel's future life with the LORD. They are chosen and stated in view of Israel's recent corruption in the worship of the golden calf. Hyatt (1971: 323), stresses that the LORD made the covenant with Moses, and only indirectly with Israel, since there is "nothing of a ceremony in which the people accept the covenant and its terms, as one finds in 24:3,7."

[43] Raitt (1991: 45) understands Ex 34:6-7 as God "explaining how he deals with sin as a way of explaining his identity." God deals with sin in a way that is congruent with his character.

In the narrative context leading up to Ex 34:6-7, I have pointed out some evidence of the compatibility and integration of divine attributes and actions found in Ex 34:6-7. I have shown that God's mercy is displayed in sparing Israel from well-deserved destruction. This mercy is shown to be compatible with divine judgment in that divine mercy (relenting from destroying Israel) did not rule out punishment (through the Levites and plague). Thus, God punished Israel. But divine punishment carried out in the context of mercy meant that God's punishment did not depart from divine patience and mercy, but was controlled and delimited by such divine attributes.

3. The Correspondence in and between Exodus 33:13-23 and 34:6-7 and Its Theological Significance

In addition to the larger *narrative* witness to the compatibility and integration of divine attributes and action, there is a *linguistic* or *verbal* witness, which I will examine in this section. First, I will identify some parallel terms within the narrative of Ex 33:12-23 that correspond to the divine attributes in Ex 34:6-7. I will discuss the theological implication of the semantic correspondences identified. Secondly, I will turn to the intertextual parallelisms between Ex 33:19 and 34:5-7. I will show how the intertextual parallelisms between these two passages serve as a guide to a correct theological interpretation of all of the divine attributes and the relationship between God's mercy and God's judgment in Ex 34:6-7.[44] Lastly, I will discuss the nature of divine freedom revealed in Ex 33:19. This provides a potential corrective to Brueggemann's interpretation of the nature of divine sovereignty and freedom as a departure from the just legal bounds in punishment.

[44] See Margaliot 1994: 47.

3.1. Terminological Correspondences between the LORD, and the LORD's Glory, Goodness, Way, Back, and Attributes

In the passage of Ex 33:12-23, there are two terms "glory" and "goodness" (כָּבוֹד and טוֹב) that correspond to the divine attributes as a whole, as shown in the chart below.[45] These correspondences point to the idea that the divine attributes of 34:6-7 are unified and altogether good (טוֹב). Accordingly, the correspondences show that the divine ways (דֶּרֶךְ) of dealing with sinners are unified and altogether good.

Chart 1: The LORD's Self-Revelation and Concealment in Ex 33:13-22 and 34:6-7

a. Moses requests to know the LORD
To know the LORD's "way" (33:13)
To know the LORD (33:13)
To see the LORD's "glory" (33:18)
There is correspondence between the three requests. To know the LORD's "way" is to know the LORD. To know the LORD is to see his "glory."

b. The LORD responds in self-revelation
"all my goodness" passes (33:19)
"my glory" passes (33:22)
"I" pass (33:22)
"The LORD" passes (34:6)
There is again correspondence between "LORD," "I," "my glory," and "all my goodness," which are interchangeable.

c. The LORD is revealed
The Divine attributes are proclaimed and revealed in audible, comprehensible words (34:6-7).
34:6-7 corresponds to and expresses in knowable terms the following:
the LORD=I=my glory=all my goodness
34:6-7 corresponds to the LORD's "back" that Moses "sees" (33:23).

In the following discussion of the terminological correspondences, I will refer to the above chart (Chart 1).

3.1.1. The LORD's Way=The LORD=The Divine Attributes of Exodus 34:6-7

In 33:12-17, wholly unsatisfied with the LORD's command to lead the Israelites to the promised land, Moses urges the LORD himself to lead his people (33:12-17). But there are some lingering questions that need to be resolved before the LORD leads his people who

[45] Another significant noun in this passage that relates to the LORD's self-revelation is "presence" (פָּנִים), which is widely recognised and therefore need not be treated here.

have corrupted themselves. How will the LORD continue to be with corrupt Israel without being constantly provoked to destroy it? How will the LORD deal with human sin and bring reconciliation? In the context of Israel's heinous sin, broken covenant, and Moses' failed attempt at making atonement for Israel, only the LORD himself seems to hold the answer to these questions. But Moses does not know yet how the LORD will reconcile this corrupt and rebellious people to himself.

Moses therefore asks to know the "way" (דֶּרֶךְ)[46] of the LORD (33:13). He asks, "Let me know your *way* that I may *understand* you" (הוֹדִעֵנִי נָא אֶת־דְּרָכֶךָ וְאֵדָעֲךָ). Moses is probably asking for a means of *knowing by experience* (יָדַע) what the LORD is like in his character and acts.[47] This interpretation is self-evident, since Moses' stated reason for wanting to know the LORD's "way" is to *know or understand* who the LORD is (וְאֵדָעֲךָ, 33:13). Moses will know the LORD through none other than the revelation of what the LORD is like. If so, the "way" of the LORD corresponds to the LORD himself and to the attributes of the LORD in 34:6-7 (it also corresponds to the LORD's "glory," but for this point see the following subsection—see "a" of Chart 1 above). Divine attributes are distinctive divine patterns of action, which reveal what God is like. By knowing the divine attributes, Moses will know the LORD's "way."

This interpretation finds further support in the LORD's initial responses to Moses. The LORD's responses jump ahead to what the LORD will do as a *result of* the accomplished reconciliation based on the revealed "way" of the LORD. Thus, the LORD assures Moses in various ways that the LORD himself ("my presence," פָּנַי, 33:14) will go with Moses and lead Israel (33:17).

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[46] The Hebrew is singular, as in 32:8, "They have quickly turned from the way (דֶּרֶךְ) that I commanded them."

[47] See Holladay 1988. In reference to the "way" (דֶּרֶךְ) mentioned in 32:8, Moberly (1983: 49) rightly states, "The word *derek* in the OT characteristically refers to Yahweh's commandments and the proclamation of his will which prescribes the way of life for his people." It is in that sense the term דֶּרֶךְ is used in 32:8, but in 33:13, the term דֶּרֶךְ is best understood as referring to the LORD's character, from which comes his commandments that reflect his character.

3.1.2. All My Goodness= My Glory=I=LORD

After securing the LORD's intention to accompany Israel to the land promised (and, by implication, to reconcile Israel to himself), Moses presses the LORD with his desire to see the LORD's "glory": "Show me your glory" (הַרְאֵנִי נָא אֶת־כְּבֹדֶךָ, 33:18). The *hifil* imperative הַרְאֵנִי can be rendered "make me experience."[48] If so, together with the *hifil* יָדַע in v.13, the *hifil* רָאָה points to Moses' strong desire to experience and understand the LORD's "glory."

The question is what the exact referent of the "glory" (כָּבוֹד) is in the text. It seems the "glory" (כָּבוֹד) or "goodness" (טוב) refers to the LORD himself. This point is supported by the fact that "my glory" (33:22), "all my goodness" (33:19), "I" (33:22),[49] and "the LORD" (34:5,6)[50] are used interchangeably.[51] The text says variously that "my glory," "all my goodness," "I," or "the LORD" passes by Moses (see "b" of Chart 1 above). If so, in asking to see or experience (יָדַע, 33:13; רָאָה, 33:18) the LORD's "glory," Moses is asking for the experience of the deepest and fullest revelation of the LORD.[52] It could be Moses' way of requesting a guaranteeing sign,[53] "a sign that God himself will truly dwell among them without judgment."[54]

As the narrative shows, the LORD honours Moses' request. Thus the LORD says, "all my goodness" (כָּל־טוּבִי, 33:19) or "my glory" (כְּבֹדִי, 33:22) will pass before Moses, and

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[48] Holladay 1988.

[49] "I," the subject of the verb עָבַר.

[50] The "LORD" that parallels "glory" and "goodness" refers both to the name (the Tetragrammaton) that is declared and to the LORD who declares that name.

[51] 1 Sam 15:29 identifies the LORD with the glory; "And also the glory of Israel will not lie or repent; for he is not mortal, that he should repent." Also, see Ps 106:20; Jer 2:11; Hos 4:7.

[52] "Glory" may refer both to "God's essential reality" that can be intellectually perceived and to "something visible and . . . the supernatural effulgence that registers the intensity of God's immanence" (Sarna 1991: 214). Thus, the LORD's glory can be captured and communicated in words as in Ex 34:6-7 and at the same time can appear like "fire" (24:15-18). Against this view, Boyd (1960: 178) equates "goodness" with the "back" that is seen and "glory" with the "face" that cannot be seen.

[53] As such, it would be similar to how Abraham asked for a sign and the LORD solemnised the covenant with a covenant rite in Gen 17; see Hamilton (1990: 429) and Sarna (1989: 114). Burns (1983: 172) correctly says that the request for the "glory" is a "plea for assurance."

[54] Fretheim 1991: 299.

"my compassion and grace" will be revealed to him (33:19). But of the LORD/goodness/glory that will be revealed to Moses, only the "back" (אָחֹרָי) will be shown, while the "face" (פָּנִים) will be hidden (33:20). Though not in the deepest and fullest measure, the LORD will reveal himself to Moses as much as a mortal can experience and understand.[55]

If my analysis thus far is right, then one can identify the referent of the anthropomorphic term "back" of the LORD ("my back," אָחֹרָי, 33:20ff) that Moses is allowed to "see" (רָאָה) or experience and understand. Moses is told that of the glory/goodness/LORD that passes by, he can "see" its "back."[56] What Moses "sees" of the glory/goodness/LORD that passes by him is the divine name, the LORD, and his attributes that are proclaimed in 34:6-7.[57] Thus, the "back" (אֲחֹרַי) of the LORD is the revealed character and way of the LORD.[58] It is "a statement about *what kind of God this is*"[59] that is proclaimed and made understandable to a mortal. Accordingly, "my glory" and "all my goodness" can be understood as the summary terms for the LORD's revealed attributes in 34:6-7.[60]

3.1.3. Theological Implications of the Correspondences: All of the Divine Attributes as Manifestations of Glory and Goodness

The discussions above have theological implications. The terms glory and goodness refer to intrinsic, inalienable characteristics of the LORD, which are inseparable

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[55] Moberly (1983: 68) says the LORD will give Moses "a deeper and fuller revelation of the character of Yahweh as a God whose very nature it is to be gracious and merciful."

[56] He is told that he cannot see the "face" (פָּנִים), for the "palm" (כַּף) will cover Moses.

[57] As Sarna (1991: 214) rightly states, the intention to proclaim the name, the LORD, parallels the LORD's intention to reveal "all [his] goodness." These intentions are fulfilled in 34:6-7. Thus, Sarna recognises a parallelism between "all my goodness," the Tetragrammaton, and 34:6-7.

[58] Since the "palm" (כַּף) is what covers Moses, its referent is most likely the cloud that came down with the LORD and covers both Moses and the LORD (cf. Ex 16:10). The "face" (פָּנִים) of the LORD then can be interpreted as the aspects of glory/goodness/LORD that cannot be revealed or comprehended by mortals. Therefore, both what is hidden (the "face") and what is revealed (the "back") simultaneously refer to the glory/goodness/the LORD that passes by Moses. For a temporal interpretation of these terms see Boyd 1960, 179ff.

[59] Fretheim 1991: 299.

[60] Just as the divine *name* represents divine being and character (Ex 3:15; 34:6-7), so do the divine "glory" and "goodness."

from the LORD. The LORD's glory and goodness necessarily refer to *the LORD himself* and to the way the LORD *is* and *acts* as delineated in general terms in 34:6-7. Put differently, the LORD's identity (who the LORD is), character (what the LORD is like), or pattern of action (how the LORD typically acts) revealed in 34:6-7 is the LORD's glory and goodness.

The significant point is that glory or goodness refers to the *whole* revelation of God in 34:6-7 rather than to a particular *part* of it. The LORD's glory is shown in all of the divine attributes; the attributes *as a whole* show the LORD's glory. The LORD's goodness is likewise explicated in all of his divine attributes. Put differently, every attribute contained in 34:6-7 (whether of mercy or of retribution) is one of divine goodness.[61] There are not two sides, one good and one bad, or one positive and one negative. If this is correct, then the whole self-revelation of the LORD in Ex 34:6-7 can be seen as a unified, integrated, coherent revelation of the LORD's glory and goodness. Ex 34:6-7 does not represent a self-contradictory, polarized statement about divine character. *All divine attributes or all aspects of God's way in Ex 34:6-7 are all strongly positive, all of divine glory and altogether good!*

The presence of these terminological correspondences and its significance alone do not exclude the possibility that Ex 34:6-7 presents a self-conflicting dualistic view of God. But it does say that the literary structures and features of the narrative running from 33:12 to 34:7 ought to place the burden of proof on those (like Brueggemann) who would affirm such a position.

3.2. Correspondences between Exodus 33:19a, 33:19c, and 34:6-7

Apart from the terminological correspondences considered above, there are other semantic or terminological correspondences within and between Ex 33:19 and 34:6-7. This

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[61] Moberly (1983: 77) states, "The fact that at the supremely critical moment in Israel's existence it is Yahweh's 'goodness' rather than judgment which is brought to the fore is of great theological importance." My point is that the divine judgment *is* revealed here as part of divine "goodness." But I agree with Moberly's statement (1983: 87) that, "the point is not that the people experience either wrath or mercy, but that both wrath and mercy are in the character of God though it is his mercy which is ultimately predominant in his dealings with his people."

is so because Ex 33:19 is a kind of announcement or "preview" of the coming self-revelation in 34:6-7. I will explain in detail the correspondences between the two passages. Then I will draw out some theological implications of such correspondences. In my discussion, I will refer to Chart 2 below.

Chart 2: Progressive Unfolding of the LORD's Self-Revelation in Ex 33:19 & 34:6-7

a		*b*		*c*
33:19a		33:19c		34:6-7
"all my goodness"	=	"I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will be compassionate on whom I will be compassionate."	=	A compassionate and gracious God; slow to anger, great in love and faithfulness, maintaining love, forgiving, holding accountable and visiting sin.
		b discloses ***a***		***c*** fully discloses both ***a*** and ***b***

3.2.1. Correspondences between Exodus 33:19 and 34:6-7

(1) In 33:19, the essential meaning of "all my goodness" (כָּל־טוּבִי) in 33:19a is disclosed in the declaration in v.19c (b discloses a): "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will be compassionate on whom I will be compassionate" (וְחַנֹּתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אָחֹן וְרִחַמְתִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם).[62] The essential content of *all* God's goodness is the LORD's free will to show compassion and grace to whomsoever God chooses. Put differently, *divine goodness is divine compassion and grace shown in divine freedom*,[63] the meaning of which I will examine below.

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[62] Sarna (1991: 214) offers a literal translation, "I will grant the grace that I will grant and show the compassion that I will show." See Lundbom 1978: 193ff for his discussion that the LORD here is using the *idem per idem* to terminate the debate with Moses and to dispense his grace (see also Hyatt 1971: 317; Freedman 1960: 154). Margaliot (1994: 47) rightly raises a strong objection: "This is definitely not an *idem per idem* construction although it so appears to most commentators. In this context, such a meaning does not make sense. It is theologically as well as logically tautological." Margaliot then suggests that "the correct translation, already found in the LXX and Vulgata," makes "excellent sense, explaining the application of the divine attributes 'gracious' and 'compassionate.'"

[63] Sarna (1991: 214) recognises that 33:19c is a statement of divine attribute shown in divine freedom: "The exercise of God's attributes is an act of pure volition on His part." See also Gowan 1994: 234. Gowan sees 33:19 also as a statement that emphasizes the surety of divine mercy.

(2) What is promised in 33:19a and 33:19c is fulfilled in 34:6-7.[64] This means *c* (Chart 2) fully discloses both *a* and *b*. It implies that *a* ("all my goodness") can be seen as a *comprehensive term* for both *b* (to be compassionate and gracious in freedom) and *c* (all of divine attributes).[65] Likewise, *b* can be seen as the *nutshell expression* of *c*, the fuller attributes in 34:6-7. Thus, the different aspects of God's revealed nature in 34:6-7 can be seen as explicating not only divine goodness (33:19a), but also divine compassion and grace shown in freedom (or divine freedom to be compassionate and merciful; 33:19c).[66] This implies a mutually interpretative relationship between 33:19a, 33:19c, and 34:6-7, to which now I turn.

3.2.2. Theological Significance of the Correspondences

The strong parallel between the terms describing the LORD and the two divine self-declarations in Ex 33:19 and 34:6-7 imply mutually interpretative relationships between all these ways of describing the LORD. Such a relationship serves as a guide to a correct theological interpretation of divine attributes and the relationship between God's mercy and judgment in 34:6-7.[67] These literary correspondences yield two crucial insights for an understanding of the unified function of the attributes in 34:6-7.

(1) If 34:6-7 explains and is parallel to 33:19c, then it implies that *all* the attributes of 34:6-7 should be interpreted as fully explicating or expressing the different aspects of *the LORD's grace and compassion shown in freedom.*[68] One specific correspondence in vocabulary between the two passages provides an important hermeneutical key in this regard. In 33:19c, God says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will be

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[64] See Childs 1974: 612; Burns 1983: 172; Margaliot 1994: 46.
[65] See Margaliot 1994: 46.
[66] The expression "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, . . . " does not permit prioritising divine freedom above divine grace and compassion or vice versa. Divine freedom and divine grace (or compassion) are expressed as inseparable qualities in which one necessarily entails the other. That is, one cannot talk about divine grace and compassion apart from divine freedom, nor can one talk about divine freedom apart from divine grace and compassion. If one does, they no longer refer to the divine character.
[67] See Margaliot 1994: 47.
[68] See Margaliot 1994: 47.

compassionate to whom I will be compassionate." Accordingly, the placement of the phrase "a compassionate and gracious God" (אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן) at the head of the whole series of divine attributes in 34:6-7 inclines me to interpret the phrase as a heading or leading term for the series of attributes that follow it. If this interpretation is correct, then this implies that the series of divine attributes explains what it means that the LORD is "a compassionate and gracious God."[69] Put differently, divine attributes of compassion and grace characterize the series of divine attributes. If this analysis is correct, then the entire formula can be seen as a disclosure of divine mercy (which includes divine justice that is tempered by divine mercy).[70]

(2) Far from standing between the contradictory, irreconcilable options of freedom and mercy (as Brueggemann would have it), the LORD is a God *with the freedom to be gracious and compassionate*. The attributes of 34:6-7 as a whole show what it means for the LORD to be *in freedom to be* gracious and compassionate. The series of attributes in 34:6-7 confirms the nature and workings of a compassionate and gracious God to be in freedom and the nature and workings of divine freedom to be compassionate and gracious. Since 33:19c stands in a parallel relationship to 34:6-7, even the divine self-descriptions relating to justice and punishment in 34:7 are to be understood as aspects of God's grace and compassion shown in freedom,[71] even as justice and punishment are revealed as part of divine goodness.

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[69] Spieckermann (2000: 310), however, sees חֶסֶד as the leading term: "There is no doubt that חֶסֶד is the leading term within the formula" and "the formula of grace in Exod 34:7 is to be understood as an interpretation just of this term." This seems unlikely in view of the fact that Ex 33:19 appears to summarize the whole formula in terms of "grace" and "mercy." I suggest the text presents חֶסֶד as an aspect of divine mercy and grace, which is the reverse of what Spieckermann is suggesting.

[70] R. Abba B. Mammel said that the Tetragrammaton "refers to the Attribute of Mercy, as it is said, *The LORD, the LORD (Adonai, Adonai) God merciful and gracious* (Ex 34, 6)" (*Exodus Rabbah*, Shemot, III 6, as cited by Gowan 1994: 246).

[71] The revelation of divine פֹּקֵד in the context of the Decalogue does not undercut פֹּקֵד as part of God's goodness. Even in the Decalogue, God's פֹּקֵד reflects God's merciful measure to limit the punishment to the maximum of three or four generations. The chief difference between the Decalogue and the "attribute formula" as the context for פֹּקֵד is that the "attribute formula" פֹּקֵד now can be understood in relationship to *all* of divine goodness.

3.3. On Divine Freedom as Freedom To Be Gracious and Compassionate

At this point, I will give more focused attention to the nature of God's freedom or sovereignty in Ex 33:19 and its implications for understanding the attributes in Ex 34. This is important because scholars like Brueggemann have interpreted divine sovereignty and freedom in terms of divine prerogative to punish. In particular, Brueggemann places God's vengeance and punishment on the side of God's freedom, separated from God's mercy. Brueggemann thus views God's punishment (as expressed in 34:7b) as sometimes going beyond sanctions or rules. But this kind of opinion is unwarranted by the parallel self-revelations in 33:19 and 34:5-7. It is not appropriate to speak of divine punishment as an expression of divine freedom to depart from divine obligation to be faithful to his covenant partner Israel as Brueggemann would have it. Here are some reasons why.

(1) As Thomas M. Raitt points out, "Punishment is the logical and self-evident course of action in a covenant which features Stipulations and Curses."[72] According to the stipulations and consequences delineated in Ex 20:5, the "logical and self-evident" and *entirely just* course of action would be a destruction of Israel. Even an utter destruction of Israel would be entirely just and within the sanctions delineated in Ex 20:5.

What is "*not* part of the Sinai Covenant *structure*" as Raitt points out is forgiveness.[73] "It is never guaranteed. Nothing locks God into forgiving or not forgiving. God never forgives any way but as a free decision."[74] Thus, based on God's sovereign freedom to be compassionate and merciful, God forgives and withdraws "the logical and self-evident course of action" of destroying Israel at the time of odious national offence.[75]

Seen from this angle, divine punishment of sin and sinners is a legal obligation the LORD has, and divine forgiveness is a divine alleviation of the legal obligation. The LORD exercises his sovereign freedom to show compassion and mercy.

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[72] Raitt 1991: 47.
[73] Raitt 1991: 47.
[74] Raitt 1991: 47.
[75] Raitt (1991: 47) remarks that "God is the God *of* the covenant and he is also the God *above* the covenant."

(2) There is no evidence in Ex 32-34 that divine punishment is ever unlimited or unjust, which Brueggemann suggests on the basis of the echo in Nah 1. Only the contrary is evident in the narrative context of Ex 32-34 and in the revelation of divine character. The expression of freedom is found precisely in God's choosing *not* to destroy Israel when that is the strict legal requirement of the covenant terms. Thus, the crucial new revelation in 33:19 and 34:6-7 is that where human sin demands destruction and the covenant contract requires strict justice, God, in his sovereign power and freedom, grants life instead. Now, *that* is an act of sovereign freedom! God's freedom is *emphatically not a freedom to punish unjustly, but a freedom to forgive and grant life in lieu of the destruction necessitated by sin.*[76] Therefore, appealing to God's sovereign freedom in this context leads me to virtually the opposite point that Brueggemann is trying to make.[77] J. Lundbom rightly says that God is at times abrupt and "irrational in the way he dispenses his grace. His judgments meanwhile are accompanied by reasons and they are valid reasons."[78] He adds that since "his love and faithfulness...originate with him they need no rationale."[79] I would add to Lundbom's comment that there is ultimately a rationale for divine mercy. It can be found in God's own merciful character and his saving purpose for his creation.

(3) Divine freedom to withhold deserved destruction and to dispense grace does not exclude but include the divine righteous will to punish, discipline, and purify God's people. Thus, 33:19 and 34:6-7 also reveal that divine punishment will be carried out *not only*

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[76] By new revelation, I do not imply that God has now become more merciful than before, but simply that God has, more than ever before, revealed what he is like at all times.

[77] The freedom of which Brueggemann speaks implies that God departs from justly established sanctions or rules. In a sense, God supersedes such rules in his exercise of mercy, especially in God's forgiving or carrying (נָשָׂא) human sin, but this is never expressed in arbitrary or uncharitable judgments. The passages in view univocally assert that punishment is never carried out in the kind of harsh or uncontrolled divine freedom to which Brueggemann refers. Most of the time, because of God's mercy, the established maximum limit of God's just, intergenerational punishment (of three or four generations) is not reached.

[78] Lundbom 1978: 200-201.

[79] Lundbom 1978: 200-201.

within the contractual boundaries that are just[80] *but also* in divine freedom to show compassion and mercy. Thus, in 32-34, God carries out limited punishment within divine compassion and grace. Divine justice is tempered by divine mercy because God has the freedom to do so. In the divine freedom spoken of in Ex 33:19 and Ex 32-34, there is *no evidence* of God's freedom being associated with God engaging in unjust punishment, "undisciplined and well beyond the enactment of sanctions" (271). Thus, there is no basis for suggesting the LORD is not always compassionate and gracious.

(4) What is supremely revealed in the passages 33:19 and 34:6-7 is that the divine acts of power and freedom are found within the overall context of divine compassion and mercy. Thus, in 33:19 God declares, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will be compassionate to whom I will be compassionate." It is overwhelming mercy and compassion rather than overwhelming and boundless vengeance that God bestows as he pleases.

In the expression, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious..." divine freedom and sovereignty are defined by divine grace and compassion. Divine freedom and sovereignty, and divine grace and compassion are expressed as inseparable qualities in which one necessarily assumes and means the other. That is, one cannot talk about divine grace and compassion apart from divine freedom and sovereignty, nor can one talk about divine freedom and sovereignty apart from divine grace and compassion. If one does, she is no longer talking about divine character.

(5) God's sovereign freedom is always in solidarity with God's people. It is not, as Brueggemann says, opposed to God's faithful love for Israel. God's sovereign freedom is what serves God's faithful commitment to Israel. Both sovereignty and solidarity are completely for the LORD and completely for God's people simultaneously (rather than

[80] Divine punishment will always be within the contractual boundaries that are just. God still reserves the right to punish to the maximum extent if that is what serves God's overall merciful purposes for his creation. See below for the "built-in" mercy even in the maximum extent delineated in the covenant structure.

sovereignty for God-self and solidarity for Israel). This means all of the divine attributes are always harmonized in divine freedom to be compassionate and gracious. This is a point that is confirmed in the detailed exegesis of Ex 34:6-7, to which I now turn.

4. A Contextual, Theological Exegesis of Exodus 34:6-7: All of Divine Attributes as Expressions of Divine Compassion and Grace

4.1. "Compassionate and Gracious"

Before I turn to the issue of how all the different attributes listed in 34:6-7 can be said to be expressions and applications of רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן "compassionate and gracious," I will turn to God's attributes of compassion and graciousness themselves. The terms רַחוּם and חַנּוּן, in these particular adjectival forms, are usually translated "compassionate" and "gracious" respectively, used exclusively of God,[81] and mostly occur in the echoes of Ex 34:6-7.[82] The fact that they are used only of God limits understanding of the precise meaning and nature of those terms. But the derivatives of the same roots show the basic range of meaning of the terms. I can safely assume, however, that the adjectives, which are used only of God, carry a special weight by comparison with their derivatives, which are used of human relationships.[83]

The derivatives of חֵן suggest "to show favour," "to act graciously." The latter meaning conveys the concept of unconditional choice as 33:19c expresses. P.J. Harland says, "The verb חנן has the sense of the bestowal of a kindness which could not rightfully be claimed."[84] חֵן stands in "contrast to חֶסֶד, which must be practised by both parties."[85]

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[81] An exception is the possible application of these two terms to "righteous" humanity in Ps 112:4: "Unto the upright light arises in the darkness; he is gracious and compassionate and righteous."
[82] In the echoes of Ex 34:6-7: 2 Ch 30:9; Neh 9:17,31; Pss 78:38; 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2. In other passages: Deut 4:31; Ps 112:4.
[83] Gowan 1994: 236.
[84] Harland 1996: 50, taking from David Noel Freedman and Jack R. Lundbom.
[85] Harland 1996: 50.

"חֵן is a free gift, usually from a person in a superior to one in an inferior position, which is given only so long as the giver desires, and it may be withdrawn at any time."[86]

The derivatives of רחם convey "deep love" rooted in a "natural" relationship, such as mother and child, even as the word "compassionate" and the word "womb" share the same root רחם. The etymological tie with the word "womb" may have semantic implications for the word "compassionate" in relation to the LORD.[87] It is especially so since the nation Israel is referred to as the LORD's "firstborn child" (Ex 4:22). By implication, the LORD is the parent of Israel who brings it into being and cares for it. The term רַחוּם therefore suggests a "*super*-natural" tie between God and Israel, a powerful tie *that cannot be broken.* Drawing from Phyllis Trible, Brueggemann says, "a God who is compassionate has a quality something like mother love."[88] That said, God's compassion is incomparably greater than the greatest compassion of a human mother. Lastly, if "gracious" expresses an unconditional *gift*, "compassionate" expresses complementary reality of the unconditional or irrevocable *commitment* of God, first to his "firstborn child" Israel and then to all of his creation. Harland rightly points out that only God is said to be "gracious and compassionate," "and he never seeks it of humans."[89]

While some basic indications of the meanings of the terms "compassionate" and "gracious" are discerned from their derivatives, the rich specificity of their meaning can only emerge from consideration of how they function in a given context as in Ex 34:6-7 in its literary context 32-34. This is so especially because these terms are used only of God and mostly in the echoes of 34:6-7—that is, unique to particular divine self-disclosure and its reaffirmation and recounting by God's people. As I have already suggested, the fuller

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[86] Harland 1996: 50.

[87] Gowan (1994: 236), however, correctly warns against "resexualization" of God in the image of woman based on the fact that "compassionate" and "womb" share the same root. He says, "a great deal has been made of that recently, as an indication of feminine qualities in God. I think it is more important to recognize that this form is a unique word that is used only of God, neither masculine nor feminine, if I hope to avoid resexualizing the God that Israel struggled so hard to desexualize."

[88] Brueggemann 1997: 216.

[89] Harland 1996: 50, taking from Freedman and Lundbom.

meaning of those terms can only be discerned and appreciated once the rest of the divine attributes (and indeed all the echoes of the formula) are more fully considered. Thus, I will consider how further aspects of God's self-revelation function to express God's compassion and grace. Treating the various phrases in the order they appear in the formula, I will start with "slow to anger."

4.2. "Slow to Anger"

As is evident in the narrative, God's grace and compassion shown toward his sinful people are expressed in divine patience, articulated in the idiom אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם, usually translated as "slow to anger."[90] The etymological association of אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם to which Brueggemann draws attention helps to clarify the function of this idiom. Brueggemann suggests that its literal (etymological) meaning of the construct form אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם is "long of nostrils," conveying the idea that divine anger takes a long time before it is expressed.[91] As such, this idiom aptly expresses God's "patience" and "longsuffering" with sinners.[92] Accordingly, I will typically use "patience" as a kind of shorthand for אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם. I will show that these provisional observations are confirmed in the manner in which God moderates and controls his anger in the larger context.

The narrative of Ex 32-33 testifies to divine patience. (1) The LORD does not act on a sudden surge of anger (as humans might do)—not when Israel is carrying out its plans to make an idol nor when Israel is fully indulging in its idol worshipping revelry (Ex 32). Instead, the LORD's first act is to confide in Moses his frustration, anger, and intention to destroy the idolatrous Israel. The narrative suggests the LORD *could* let his anger burn to the point of destroying the people, but he *does not* let it burn yet; he is only talking about it

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[90] The phrase אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם is an idiom occurring thirteen times in the Old Testament, nine of which are in Ex 34:6 and its echoes.

[91] Brueggemann 1997: 216.

[92] Rashi comments that אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם in Ex 34:6-7 implies that "He defers his anger and does not hasten to punish—it may be that the sinner will repent." Likewise, Calvin (1950 [*Moses*, vol. 3]: 386) comments, "He patiently waits for those who have sinned, and invites them to repentance by His long-suffering." He adds, "should God's clemency be perverted into a licence for sin, it is added 'will by no means clear.'"

(32:10). Divine patience assumes (a) God's severe "burning anger" (חֲרוֹן אַפִּי; 32:12) against idolaters, and (b) God's self-control that is greater than the anger itself and therefore controls it. Divine patience affords Moses the chance to intercede on behalf of Israel.

(2) Divine patience is displayed even in the manner God punishes Israel. Thus the LORD *partially* punishes the nation through the Levites who kill three thousand people by the sword. In addition, the LORD postpones much of his punishment, hinting at an eventual destruction of the sinners (perhaps fulfilled in Num 14ff—see Chapter 3): "Whoever sinned against me I will blot out of my book.... When the day comes for punishment, I will punish them for their sin" (32:34). But for now, the LORD afflicts the nation with a plague.[93] In all this, divine patience assures that the jealous God's burning anger will not be sudden and will not be "out of control." In other words, the statement that God is "slow to anger" entails that *he does not suddenly act upon all-consuming wrath.*[94]

(3) God is also patient in the way he reaches the final resolution for Israel's sin. After bringing a limited measure of punishment, the LORD temporarily withholds his presence from Israel's camp (33:7ff). During this time Moses and the LORD interact in an intimate friendship, which provides a firm foundation for Moses' request for reconciliation

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[93] Hyatt (1971: 312) says, "literally, 'And the LORD smote the people.' Yahweh's smiting usually means sending a plague (cf. 12:23,27; Jos. 24:5; Isa. 19:22)." The exact nature of the plague cannot be determined, but the plague has been linked to the "the drinking of the powdered image in water." Hyatt 1971: 308, 312. Moberly (1983: 59) suggests that the plague is the immediate fulfilment of the previous verse, concluding the LORD's "immediate response to Israel's sin." It may be that the plague is "the immediate" but partial fulfilment, and the future and more complete punishment is administered in Num 14. This is Rashi's understanding; the verse speaks of a deferred punishment (Rashi on Ex 32:34). Numbers 14 states that Israel is punished for their present sin and for all their previous sins, which would include their sin in worshipping the golden calf. Thus, Gowan (1994: 228) correctly observes that it is unlikely that Israel saw the plague of v.35 as the fulfilment of v.34. Hyatt (1971: 311) says, "The sentence may reflect the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C., which was interpreted as resulting from Israel's sins, including the worship of the golden calves of Dan and Bethel erected by Jeroboam (2 Kg. 17:7-18, especially verse 6)." *Exodus Rabbah* says, "Had Israel waited for Moses and not perpetrated that act, there would have been no exile, neither would the Angel of Death have had any power over them" (XXXII: 1; cf. XLIII.2, as cited by Gowan 1994: 221).

[94] Most definitely in the *eschaton*, as all the eschatological prophecies would indicate, all evil will be ultimately judged and eliminated from God's kingdom.

and the LORD's affirmative response to Moses. In divine patience, the LORD allows his compassion and grace to work out a concrete and lasting solution for the problems of Israel's sin and rebellion.

The LORD is patient with this "stiff-necked" people and even extends his great steadfast love and faithfulness to them. Thus, instead of "cutting off" the nation of Israel, the LORD in patience either withholds the punishment, or limits the punishment, or postpones the punishment (Ex 32-33). As Nahum Sarna has pointed out, "Divine forbearance does not mean that sinners can expect wholly to escape the consequences of their misdeeds."[95] Rather it means that God will govern his righteous anger with patience, self-control, timeliness, and purposefulness. The LORD in his patience also brings out a lasting, life-affirming solution to the problem of sin.

4.3. "Great in Steadfast Love and Faithfulness"

Now I turn to the expression וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת, "great in steadfast love and faithfulness." In this subsection, (1) I will first consider the general meaning of the terms חֶסֶד and אֱמֶת. (2) Then I will turn to Genesis 24 where this pair of terms first appears in the canon. (3) I will come back to the Exodus text and draw some conclusions about the *greatness* of חֶסֶד and אֱמֶת.

Brueggemann rightly says, drawing from the studies of Nelson Glueck, Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, and Gordon Clark,[96] that the term חֶסֶד is "related to tenacious fidelity in a relationship, readiness and resolve to continue to be loyal to those to whom one is bound." The term חֶסֶד is thus often translated as "steadfast love." Jacob Milgrom stresses, "it refers to God's fidelity to His commitments, that is, to His covenant. In fact, חֶסֶד can actually be a synonym of *berit*, 'covenant' (e.g., Deut 7:9,12; 2 Sam. 7:15;

[95] Sarna 1991: 216.
[96] See Glueck 1968; Sakenfeld, 1985, 1978; Clark 1993.

1 Kings 3:6; Pss. 86:5; 89:25,50)."[97] Thus, I will use the translation "steadfast covenant love" or simply "covenant love."

Of the term אֱמֶת, Brueggemann rightly says that it points to "complete trustworthiness and reliability, which then becomes the term true/truth."[98] The term אֱמֶת is thus translated into "faithfulness."

The word-pair חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת first appears without the qualifying רַב in Genesis 24 in the context of the LORD showing steadfast covenant love and faithfulness to Abraham by providing a wife for Isaac (Gen 24:12,14,27,49).[99] Such provision is made in order that the LORD's promises to Abraham—innumerable descendants, the gift of the land, and the blessing of the nations (12:1ff)—may continue to be fulfilled. In this way, the LORD's steadfast covenant love and faithfulness can be seen as intricately related to the LORD's covenant with Abraham.

That חֶסֶד and אֱמֶת are closely related to God's commitment to the Abrahamic covenant is not explicitly stated in the formula of Ex 34. But the narrative of 32-34 assumes such a relationship. The issue of the LORD's faithfulness to the covenant that he swore to Abraham is mentioned twice in the narrative: once by Moses (32:13) and once by God (33:1).

The present generation of Israel broke the covenant with the LORD.[100] The crucial question is whether the LORD will confirm that rupture or heal that rupture by showing

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[97] Milgrom (1990: 396) adds, "Thus, if from the long list of God's attributes, Moses asks Him to operate according to His *hesed*, he is imploring God to continue to maintain His covenantal relationship with His people."

[98] Brueggemann (1997: 217) goes on to say, "The words *hesed and emeth* become a characteristic and much-used word pair in the Old Testament, together marking Yahweh as utterly reliable and trustworthy."

[99] In this narrative, Abraham's steward Eliezer is sent on a mission to find a wife for Isaac. The steward repeatedly uses this special pair of terms in his prayers to the LORD to show covenant love and faithfulness to Abraham by providing a wife for Isaac (Gen 24:12,14,27,49). Abraham's steward rightly understood that the LORD's provision of a wife for Isaac is inextricably related to the LORD's fulfilment of his promise. The word pair also appears in Gen 32:11 and 47:29.

[100] Some argue that the covenant broken here is the Mosaic covenant, based on the understanding that the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional and unbreakable. See Sarna's comment on Gen 15:9-17 (1989: 114).

incomparable steadfast love and faithfulness to this generation of Israel in view of its hate and disloyalty. Moses will argue for the latter.

In 32:13, faced with a brazen sin that calls for the destruction of Israel, Moses invokes God's oath to the patriarchs concerning descendants and the land:

> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by yourself, and you spoke to them, "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land which I have spoken of, I will give to your descendants, and they will possess it forever."

Moses also raises the issue of the LORD's reputation among the nations (32:11-12), which is an indirect appeal to the LORD's commitment to bless the nations through Abraham's descendants. Moses' logic seems to be this: if the LORD destroys Israel, not only the means of blessing the nations will be destroyed, but also the LORD's name will be belittled and scorned among the nations. If so, the nations will not turn to the LORD and so will not be blessed through Israel's witness. In sum, Moses' intercession appeals to the LORD's oath to Abraham in Gen 12:1-3, calling upon the LORD to continue to fulfil his promise. The LORD's attribute וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת with emphasis on רַב becomes all-important at this juncture.

The LORD is under no obligation to fulfil the Abrahamic covenant to the *present* descendants of Abraham who have deviated from the LORD's way. The fulfilment of his promise to Abraham is *contingent upon* the continued faithfulness of Abraham's descendants, the beneficiaries of the covenant (Gen 18:19). The LORD initiates the covenant, but the covenant relationship requires and is maintained by the faithfulness of each party. The LORD would still be faithful to his covenant sworn to Abraham even if he destroyed the present rebellious generation of Israel and started a new Israel with Moses (Abraham's descendant).

With that in the background, I now turn to Ex 34:6, where וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת is proclaimed as part of the divine character. It is noticeable that in the phrase

וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת, the term רַב ("great [in]") is added to the word pair חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת. This adds emphasis and probably signals that חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת here is greater and stronger than חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת shown to Abraham. Indeed, the context shows that the term רַב indicates the *incomparability* of חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת shown to rebellious Israel from that shown to faithful and righteous Abraham because the LORD's steadfast covenant love and faithfulness overcome the crisis of Israel's rebellion against the LORD. Since the Israelites failed to keep their side of the covenant, only an *entirely free and unmerited work of God's grace and compassion* is able to bring reconciliation between God and Israel and allow the covenant relationship to be maintained. God's grace is the primary basis of God's reconciliation. This implies that the merits of the patriarchs are secondary to God's grace and subsumed under God's grace that goes beyond the call of duty. The magnanimity of the LORD's covenant love and faithfulness to the undeserving Israel is expressed in וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת (with the emphasis on רַב). God's וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת is indeed an expression of God's being entirely and freely gracious and compassionate. God chooses to maintain the covenant not only with a faithful covenant partner (such as Abraham) but also with a radically unfaithful covenant partner (such as Israel in Ex 32).

4.4. "Maintaining Steadfast Love (חֶסֶד) to Thousands"

Israel indeed receives incomparable generosity from the LORD, because he is great in steadfast covenant love and faithfulness. This is here confirmed by the phrase נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים ("maintaining love to thousands" of Ex 34:7). The expressions נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים and וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת are closely related; the latter flows out of the former. Because the LORD is "great in steadfast covenant love and faithfulness" the LORD will "maintain love to thousands." Keeping in mind the above discussion of the term חֶסֶד in the expression וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת, I will now examine the meaning and function of נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים in Ex 32-34. I begin by turning to Ex 20:5f where a similar phrase "showing steadfast love to thousands" appears.

4.4.1. A Similar Expression in the Decalogue

A similar expression first appears at the end of the second commandment of the Decalogue (Ex 20:6): וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד לַאֲלָפִים לְאֹהֲבַי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָי ("showing steadfast covenant love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my commandments") (עָשָׂה-phrase henceforth). The Decalogue has עָשָׂה (literally "making" or "carrying out"), instead of נֹצֵר, and the qualifying clause לְאֹהֲבַי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָי. One striking interpretative factor is that in the Decalogue the עָשָׂה-phrase, along with the פֹּקֵד-phrase,[101] explains what the LORD is "the jealous God" (אֵל קַנָּא, Ex 20:5) means.[102]

That God is "jealous" (קַנָּא) means he demands absolute loyalty and faithfulness, even as the LORD is absolutely loyal and faithful to his people.[103] The jealous God is one who hates those who hate him and loves those who love him. *Thus, the "jealous God" is one who both "visits sin" to the third and fourth generations of those who hate him and shows kindness to thousands of generations of those who love him* (Ex 20:5-6). The term קַנָּא "finds expression either in judgment or kindness,"[104] depending on the human response to divine covenant love and faithfulness. Divine קַנָּא has to do with God's supreme love for his people, and this קַנָּא love expresses itself in constant, enduring, overwhelming *kindness* and in restricted, momentary *punishment*. In this subsection, I will focus on the kindness of the jealous God.

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[101] Ex 20:5 reads: פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים.

[102] Freedman (1960:155) rightly recognises that divine "zeal"(קַנָּא) "finds expression either in judgment or kindness (cf. Ex 20:5-60)." By contrast, Brueggemann interprets divine jealousy as a "savage propensity" to respond in "destructive fury" to anyone who offends "Yahweh's prerogative, privilege, ascendancy, or sovereignty" (1997: 293-294). Such divine jealousy and rage can turn against Israel or against Israel's enemies. In relation to Israel, then, Brueggemann sees divine jealousy as potentially both negative and positive, but it cannot be seen as compatible with kindness.

[103] The term קַנָּא in this form occurs only five times in the Old Testament, all in the Pentateuch, and all used of God (Ex 20:5; 34:14. Deut 4:24; 5:9; 6:15). Freedman (1960: 155) points out that the term קַנָּא signifies "the exclusive relationship between Yahweh and Israel." He also points out the fact that "it is parallel to 'love' in Cant 8:6." He suggests the translation "zeal, zealous," because "jealousy" "is a misleading translation, especially when the term is used of God," "because of its modern connotations." J.M.P. Smith (1912: 288) comments that the LORD in those passages is "presented as the originator and guardian of the law of righteousness, who regards every violation of that law as an offence against himself which must be fitly punished."

[104] Freedman 1960: 155.

In the context of the Decalogue, the recipient of the jealous LORD's kindness is identified as follows: לַאֲלָפִים לְאֹהֲבַי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָי. In this expression, the phrase לְאֹהֲבַי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָי ("*to* those who love me and obey my commandments") modifies לַאֲלָפִים ("*to* thousands"). This lends itself to the interpretation that the LORD will show steadfast love to each of the thousands of generations that loves and obeys his commandments. If so, this means that the LORD's covenant love shown (וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד) is contingent upon human love and obedience. This interpretation of Ex 20:6 seems consistent with what the LORD says to Israel immediately before the giving of the law in Ex 19:5: "Now *if* (וְעַתָּה אִם) you obey me fully and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession" (italics mine). The LORD will show covenant love (וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד) *if* Israel obeys the LORD and keeps his covenant.

Sarna gives another plausible interpretation in which divine acts of love (וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד) are not contingent upon each generation's obedience but determined by one faithful, meritorious generation. Thus Sarna says, "The merit for the *hesed* that people perform endures beyond their own generation."[105] This interpretation of the divine חֶסֶד as collective, transgenerational, unchanging, and enduring in nature finds its support in the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 22. Abraham "jealously" loved God (Gen 22). Thus, the LORD swears by himself that he will bless Abraham's descendants and all nations through them, twice emphasizing the fact that the LORD will do this because Abraham obeyed the LORD and did not withhold his son (Gen 22:16,18). Because Abraham "jealously" loved God, the LORD will "jealously" love Abraham and his descendants.

The question is which of these two interpretations is correct. It seems that these interpretations do not present *alternative*, but rather *complementary* ways of understanding the expression in question. That is, it seems that the LORD's revealed intention is to fulfil

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[105] Sarna 1991: 216. This sort of interpretation may reflect a lack of appreciation for the unmerited aspect of God's grace. At the least, it is unmerited grace when God "applies" the righteousness of an earlier generation to a later. God does not have to do that according to strict justice.

his enduring and unchanging חֶסֶד to Abraham and to thousands of generations after him through their own obedient walk with God (Gen 18:19). Any particular generation that rebels against the LORD can forfeit the LORD's חֶסֶד, but overall commitment to Abraham and his descendents would remain constant.

If this analysis of וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד-phrase of 20:7 is correct, then what נֹצֵר חֶסֶד-phrase of 34:7 conveys is quite striking.

4.4.2. The Expression נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים in Exodus 34:7

What happens to וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד-phrase of Ex 20:7 in 34:7 is as follows. First the qualifying clause "to those who love me and obey my commandments" is dropped here. This may point to the LORD's freedom to be gracious and compassionate, which manifests itself in his steadfast love even to those who are faithless. God's commitment to show covenantal love now extends not only to a faithful generation, but also to the present rebellious Israel. It seems that divine חֶסֶד is now being revealed as being independent of human merit. In addition, the focus is shifted from the specific divine acts of love (וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד) to enduring maintenance of it (נֹצֵר חֶסֶד). Such divine commitment and tenacity is captured in the term נֹצֵר which replaces עשׂה of 20:7. Secondly, the נֹצֵר חֶסֶד-phrase is declared as part of the divine character.

The etymology of the root נצר is illustrated in the Assyrian *nasâru* "watch over, protect" and Old Aramaic נצר "protect."[106] The term נֹצֵר conveys the ideas of keep watching, guarding, protecting, and preserving with fidelity. In the context of 32-34, the term נֹצֵר may convey God's incomparable resolution to continue to bestow his steadfast love to the Israelites to thousands of generations even if they prove unworthy of divine "acts of steadfast love" (Ex 20:6). In the attribute וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת, the LORD shows that the LORD *brings reconciliation and renewal of the covenant* based on an entirely free and unmerited work of God's grace and compassion. In the attribute נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים, the

[106] Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1979: 665.

LORD shows that the LORD is the one who *unconditionally maintains, preserves, and protects the covenant love to thousands* based on an entirely free and unmerited work of God's grace and compassion. The LORD's חֶסֶד is indeed boundless—boundless in the sense that ultimately it does not depend on human love and obedience and boundless in the sense that it extends to innumerable generations.

This meaning of נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים needs not be contradicting or nullifying of what is said of the LORD's enduring, unchanging love to Abraham. This is so especially in light of the fact that the LORD's covenant love for Abraham decisively changed the LORD's mind from destroying Israel in Ex 32. What is changed here is this: Instead of showing (וְעֹשֶׂה) steadfast covenant love חֶסֶד on the basis of human response in love and obedience to the LORD (Ex 20:7; cf. Gen 18:19), the LORD will now preserve and protect his enduring and unchanging חֶסֶד even to and through this rebellious generation, even for thousands of generations after them. What is shown here is the divine prerogative to confirm חֶסֶד to a rebellious generation and their descendants solely based on divine compassion and graciousness.

The question is: Wherein lies the compatibility of divine covenant love (חֶסֶד) and divine punishment (פֹּקֵד) in the formula of 34:6-7?[107] The answer is not easy or straightforward. I will answer this question after my discussion of the פֹּקֵד-phrase below. But I can suggest here that within the LORD's overall freedom to show compassion and grace to the whole of Israel, the LORD still reserves the right to judge and reward human actions according to human demerit or merit in relation to the covenant stipulations and sanctions.

4.5. "Bearing/Forgiving Iniquity, Rebellion, and Sin"

While the LORD's work of grace and compassion is unmerited by the sinner, it is not without cost to the LORD himself. The LORD himself carries the burden of sin and

[107] In the Decalogue, the unity and harmony between divine love and punishment may be found in the fact that they are both expressions of the divine attribute of "jealousy."

punishment. The phrase נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה in Ex 34:7 expresses this idea. The expression in 34:7 is usually translated as "to forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin."[108] While this translation is appropriate for this context, it does not fully convey the proper significance of this theologically rich expression. As Jacob Milgrom rightly pointed outs, "to remove or forgive iniquity" is only the resultant meaning of the expression נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן (and a similar point can be made with respect to פֶּשַׁע or חַטָּאָה) rather than a more literal meaning of the expression. I will explain what I mean based on the etymological observations Jewish scholars such as Levine, Milgrom, and Sarna, make on the expression. I begin with the following observations: (1) The terms for offences or sin עָוֹן ("iniquity"), פֶּשַׁע ("rebellion"), and חַטָּאָה ("sin") are also standard terms for guilt and punishment in the Old Testament.[109] Indeed, iniquity, rebellion, or sin results in guilt and punishment. (2) The term נָשָׂא variously means to "lift," "carry," or "bear." Thus the expression נָשָׂא עָוֹן (and a similar point can be made with respect to פֶּשַׁע or חַטָּאָה) used of God means "to lift, carry away iniquity"[110] and punishment from sinners, or as Sarna puts it, "to bear iniquity, that is, incur responsibility."[111] In other words, as Jacob Milgrom writes, the idiom means "'literally carry (the consequences of) sin,' that is, suffer punishment." Milgrom further points out that this meaning is shared by "its Akkadian equivalent *zabalu arna (hitu).*"[112] The resultant meaning of God carrying away iniquity from the sinner, bearing sin, incurring responsibility, and suffering punishment is "to remove or forgive iniquity."[113] Thus, the expression simultaneously shows that God forgives and how God forgives. That is, the LORD removes iniquity from the sinner or forgives iniquity by himself

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[108] The term נָשָׂא used in this sense is also in Lev 10:17 (of priests); Num 14:18; Hos 14:3; Mic 7:18; Pss 32:5; 85:3.
[109] Guilt and/or punishment for עָוֹן: Gen 4:13; Lev 5:1-17; 19:8; 20:17; Ezek 4:4; for פֶּשַׁע: Dan 8:12,13; 9:24; Ps 59:4; Ezek 33:10; Is 24:20; for חַטָּאָה: Lev 19:17; 20:20; Deut 15:9; Ezek 23:49.
[110] Levine 1993: 367.
[111] Sarna 1991: 184.
[112] Milgrom 1990: 115.
[113] Levine 1993: 367.

carrying the sin and incurring the penalty for that sin.[114] The LORD unburdens a sinner or a sinful nation of their "offences and of their consequent punishments" by himself bearing them.[115] As such, God's forgiveness for Israel would come at a personal cost to God. In this way, the divine freedom to be merciful and compassionate to the rebellious (as in Ex 33:19) is exercised within the divine requirement for justice. With the foregoing discussion in mind, I will use as my working translation: "to bear/forgive iniquity, rebellion and sin."

The question is: What does it mean that God bears or forgives human sin and its consequences in the context of Ex 32-34? The following three points can be observed:

(1) The content of divine forgiveness, in the context of 32-34, is in the affirmation of Israel's ongoing existence and in the mitigation of punishment of Israel. God bears or carries the brunt of Israel's sin and its consequences so that Israel might have a continued life with the LORD. The LORD bears the consequences of sin *that Israel itself cannot bear without being utterly destroyed.* Israel thus escapes destruction. Yet, this does not mean that the LORD entirely removes or eliminates the punishment due Israel. Rather, the LORD's work in נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה mitigates the punishment.[116] Thus the LORD still holds the sinful people responsible for their sin, partially (though still severely) punishing them. In other words, Israel as a nation still bears some of its own sin, guilt, and punishment. Thus some Israelites were killed by the Levites at the LORD's command (32:27ff) and untold number of people became ill or died in the plague from the LORD (32:35).[117] This affirms that within the LORD's bearing Israel's sin and its consequences, the LORD has the freedom to mete out punishment as the LORD sees appropriate. It is the LORD's way of partially *purging out* from Israel sin and sinners alike for the LORD intends Israel to be holy.

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[114] Cf. Ashley 1993: 258.

[115] Levine 1993: 367.

[116] Thus the LORD's atoning or reconciling work in נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה may be spoken of in terms of limited vicariousness, which also implies limited punishment of sinners.

[117] Fretheim (1991: 290) points out that the LORD's decision to punish some is "not a reversal of the divine action of 32:14, which simply entailed that the people would not be destroyed."

It is also the LORD's way of showing the ultimate destiny of those who hate God, which ought to serve as a strong warning that inspires true repentance on the part of the offenders.

(2) Another aspect of divine "forgiveness" or "sin-bearing" is the postponement of punishment. That God carries Israel's sin and its consequences (thus only partially punishing Israel) holds the possibility of further and fuller punishment in the future. God bears human sin and defers punishment in his forbearance.[118] This interpretation finds support in the dialogue between Moses and the LORD in Ex 32:31-34. The morning after God's punishment through the Levites' zeal, Moses sees that it has not atoned for Israel's great sin,[119] and there is no sign of God's forgiveness of sins. Moses therefore tries to make atonement for Israel's sin himself: "Now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps *I can make atonement for your sins*" (אֲכַפְּרָה בְּעַד חַטַּאתְכֶם, 32:30). With such an intention, Moses goes back to the LORD and says, "If *you will forgive their sin* (תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם),[120] if not, blot me out of the book you have written" (32:32). Moses' first proposal is that the LORD simply bears and suffers the wrong done by the Israelites and grant the atonement Moses is seeking. Moses' second proposal, in case the first is refused, is that the LORD takes his life as atonement for Israel's sin.[121] The LORD responds by rejecting Moses' offer of his life and threatening further punishment of those who have sinned. It appears that while the LORD is in some sense agreeing to bear Israel's sin (תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם) so that Israel has a continued life, the LORD will not completely remove or atone for Israel's sin. Rather

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[118] Freedman 1986: 29-36.

[119] The Levites' zeal for the LORD and the LORD's covenant of a priesthood of Levites parallel Phinehas' zeal for the LORD and the LORD's covenant of a lasting priesthood of his descendants (Num 25). A contrasting element is that Phinehas' voluntary act is recognised as having an atoning effect for Israel whereas the Levites' act of obedience is not.

[120] The expression תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם has the same meaning as the expression נֹשֵׂא ... חַטָּאָה of 34:7. Hyatt (1971: 311) points out, "the apodosis is missing in the Hebrew text; LXX, Samaritan text, and Targum of Jonathan have the imperative, 'forgive!' This is to be understood, even if it was not expressed."

[121] Noth 1962: 251. Also, Fretheim 1991: 290. Hyatt (1971: 311) too, draws attention to Num 11:15, where "in a similar situation, Moses says, 'kill me at once.'" But Gowan (1994: 227) is of a different opinion. He says, "[I]t is more appropriate to understand him saying if Israel must die, he wants to die with them." I suggest that since Moses' stated reason for the ascent to Mt Sinai is to make atonement for Israel, what he says to the LORD is best understood as a means to accomplish just that.

the LORD will "pay it back" on Israel in the future: "When the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin" (32:34).[122] Thus, the LORD's נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה is manifested in terms of mitigation and postponement of punishment rather than complete removal or atonement of sin. The temporary mitigation and deferment of the punishment inherently holds the possibility of future and further punishment when provoked by persistence in rebellion.[123] It appears, therefore, that the issue of the atonement for Israel's apostasy of Ex 32 remains unresolved in Ex 32-34. Thus, this leads me to the next point.

(3) Lastly, an important expression of נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה is found in God literally carrying (the consequences of) sin and suffering punishment. While this basic meaning of the expression or image of God suffering punishment for human sin is not made explicit in the context of Ex 32-34, one could argue that it is latent in the expression. This is supported by the logical implications of the theological concepts found in Ex 32-34. That is, if God is not granting Israel (complete) atonement or removal of sin in Ex 32-34 (and is granting only mitigation and postponement of punishment), then the LORD's carrying Israel's sin holds at least two potentials: (a) The LORD may fully "visit" Israel's sin upon itself, which implies destruction of Israel; or, (b) The LORD will not fully "visit" Israel's sin upon itself, which implies that some of the punishment will be suffered by God. The LORD's covenant with Israel (in Abraham) precludes option a (as already demonstrated in Ex 32). Thus, we are left with option b, although what God's suffering punishment means exactly is not clarified in the context of Ex 32-34.[124]

In sum, the phrase נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה in the context of Ex 32-34 has the explicit meaning of God carrying human sin and the accompanying consequences and of

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[122] Fretheim (1991: 290) says, "The divine response is not easy to fathom." Yet what is clear is that the LORD rejects Moses' offer of his life as atonement. Even the most righteous of Israel cannot make atonement for Israel's sin; it is not the LORD's way (cf. 33:13 and discussion above).

[123] Kselman 1992: 832.

[124] One could say that Moses' plea for atonement for Israel's sin is answered by the divine revelation of נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה which finds its ultimate expression in the suffering of God and of the Suffering Servant as found in several Isaianic passages. (See Chapter 4). See Fretheim (1984) for the theme of divine suffering in the Old Testament, including narrative's like Exodus.

God deferring to punish. It may also have the latent meaning of God suffering punishment to affect and grant atonement. It is important to recognise that any aspect of the LORD's forgiveness is not a matter of overlooking the offense committed, but the LORD's sovereign choice to suffer in varying ways the consequences of human sin so as to affirm human life.

4.6. Holding the Sinner Accountable and Punishing

I have said that divine punishment is part of divine goodness, that is, divine mercy and compassion shown in freedom. I will now explain this further by considering the last two phrases of the formula, which are specifically about divine judgment. In the context of 32-34, the two phrases are often taken either as being contrary to divine mercy or else as being subsumed under divine mercy so as not to be emphasized at all. I will start with the interpretation of the meaning of the two phrases, and then turn to the issue of their compatibility to divine mercy.

4.6.1. Meanings of the נַקֵּה- and פֹּקֵד-Phrases

An expression similar to נַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה (now on נַקֵּה-phrase) appears in the Decalogue, which is the expression לֹא יְנַקֶּה ("not clearing," 20:7). The expression לֹא יְנַקֶּה appears in close proximity to the פֹּקֵד-phrase in the Decalogue (20:5): פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים לְשֹׂנְאָי. These two expressions mutually interpret each other and function together as one thought, a thought having to do with God's "jealousy" (קַנָּא).[125] That God "does not altogether clear the guilty"[126] (נַקֵּה-phrase) means that "God will visit[127] the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate him" (פֹּקֵד-phrase) or vice versa (Ex 34:7b;

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[125] Fretheim (1991: 302) states, "[D]ivine jealousy is missing from the formulation." But, as I show here, the נַקֵּה- and פֹּקֵד-phrases in 34:7 basically stand for the divine attribute "jealousy."

[126] JPS renders the phrase, "not completely acquitting" or "not remitting all punishment." Childs (1974) renders the phrase, "he does not remit all punishment" which reflects the sense of forgiveness. Likewise, Fretheim (1991, 302) suggests that since the phrase occurs "in the context of forgiveness," it means "but not neglecting just judgment."

[127] פֹּקֵד has many usages: "number," "reckon," "visit," "punish," "appoint," "miss," etc. While it is translated into "visit," in contexts of God's dealing with sin, it is appropriate to render פֹּקֵד "punish" (e.g., Ex 32:34; Lev 18:25; Isa 26:21; Jer 25:12; 36:31; Hos 8:13; Am 3:14). Levine (1993: 366-367) suggests, "The idiom *paqad 'al* connotes punishment. The basic sense of *paqad* is 'to hand over, deliver, assign,'

cf. 20:5).[128] These clauses together express the punitive side of the divine attribute "jealousy" (קַנָּא) in both the Decalogue and in the formula of Ex 34:6-7.

The jealous God is one who hates idolatry (Ex 20:5 and 34:14), and his response to idolaters is "burning anger" (חֲרוֹן אַף, 32:12). Thus in 34:14, the LORD warns, "Do not worship other gods, for the LORD, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God" (יְהוָה קַנָּא שְׁמוֹ אֵל קַנָּא הוּא, 34:14).[129] In other words, the jealous LORD will hold an idolater responsible and mete out severe punishment. God will not altogether clear the guilty but punish them. As Gowan aptly says, "God does not declare the guilty innocent or the innocent guilty, or say it really doesn't matter."[130]

Accordingly, God's initial response to the idolatrous Israel of the golden calf is his readiness to unleash his "burning anger"(חֲרוֹן אַף; 32:12)[131] which, when poured out, would utterly consume the object of his wrath (Ex 32:10).[132] Thus, God tells Moses that he intends to destroy Israel for breaking his covenant. But Moses boldly intercedes for Israel, making an appeal to God's own oath to the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). As a consequence, God "repents" (וַיִּנָּחֶם, 32:14),[133] turns from "burning anger," and withholds

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hence 'to turn one's thoughts, attention to' another person or concern. . . . It is not entirely clearly how *paqad 'al* came to mean 'punish.' Either *paqad 'al* means 'to count against, hold accountable,' or it means 'to turn one's attention to'—for the purpose of punishing."

[128] I have already noted that these companion phrases first appear in close proximity in the second and third commandments of the Decalogue respectively. There, these two phrases together promise the surety of the LORD's righteous judgment and vengeance on idolaters and abusers of the divine name. To some extent, the mutual explication between the two is already present in the Decalogue, but it is even clearer in 34:7b where they are directly juxtaposed, functioning as one thought.

[129] This can be seen as a summary statement of Ex 20:5-7.

[130] Gowan 1994: 237 (after, Freedman 1955: 14)

[131] Maimonides (1948: 50-52) points out that the expressions "burning anger," "provocation," and "jealousy" are applied to God only in reference to idolatry. He cites Deut 6:15; 7:10; 11:16; 16:22; 31:29; 32:19,21; Jer 8:19.

[132] The LORD had promised love to those who love him and punishment to the third and fourth generation of those who hate him. In the case of the golden calf, the entire nation appears to fall into the latter category. It is possible that the Levites did not sin directly (see 32: 26ff), but the text does not clarify this. In any case, they are included in the collective guilt that falls on the nation and still subject to some degree of punishment.

[133] Hyatt (1971: 307) points out that "repent" נחם *nifal* here means, "change one's mind or purpose." Hyatt continues, "Not infrequently in the OT Yahweh is said to repent. . . . The bases of Yahweh's repenting are three: (i) intercession, as here and in Am. 7:1-6; (ii) repentance of the people (Jer. 18:3ff.; Jon. 3:9f); and (iii) Yahweh's compassionate nature (Jg. 2:18; Dt. 32:36; 2 Sam. 24:16)."

from destroying them. Thus, the LORD's great steadfast love and faithfulness to the Patriarchs and their descendants are demonstrated. Nevertheless, the narrative testifies that many were executed. God "visited" (פֹּקֵד) upon them their sin and its consequences.

As mentioned above (4.4), the פֹּקֵד [134]-phrase first appears in the Old Testament in the Decalogue. The פֹּקֵד -phrase, along with the וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד-phrase explains what it means that the LORD is "the jealous God" in 20:6-7. The jealous God shows both constant, enduring, overwhelming *kindness* to those who love him and restricted, momentary *punishment* to those who hate him. As Sarna points out, in the Decalogue, the phrase "who hate me" (לְשֹׂנְאָי) "may modify 'parents' or 'children' or both." This may mean that, "The verdict applies only when subsequent generations perpetuate the evils of their parents."[135]

The perplexing factor in Ex 34:7 is that the qualifying expression "who hate me" (לְשֹׂנְאָי) is dropped and "to children's children" (וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים) is added. Thus, 34:7 has פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים. In the face of this, "to the third and fourth generation" (עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים) in 34:7 seems problematic. The expression "third and fourth" is elsewhere used "in a context of longevity as a divine reward for righteousness" (Gen 50:23; 2 Kings 10:30; Job 42:16).[136] But here it appears to describe "the enduring, baneful effects of evil."[137] It seems to imply that the LORD's punishment will also follow into many of the succeeding generations.[138] Taken at face value, there is "the implied injustice of making subsequent generations pay

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[134] Dentan (1963: 47) points out the fact that the *kal* active participle פקד occurs only in Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes and in Jeremiah (11:22; 23:2, 29:32; 44:29; 46:25; 50:18), "in all instances God being the subject."

[135] Sarna (1991: 111) draws this insight from Rabbinic exegesis (Berakhot. 7a, Sanhedrin 27b, Mekhilta de-R. Ishmael, at Ex 20:5 are cited by Sarna) that "seized on the ambiguity to soften the apparent harshness of the statement."

[136] Sarna 1991: 111.

[137] Sarna 1991: 111.

[138] Deut 24:16 explicitly forbids human vicarious punishment in Israel's legal system. Some sée Ezek 18:1-20; Jer 31:29-30 as a revision of this punitive statement of 20:5 (Ex 34:7) in the face of "intensification of the problem of evil . . . for it was perceived as engendering or deepening a pervasive feeling of hopelessness and apathy in an era of acute national crisis" (Sarna 1991: 110).

for the sins of their ancestors."[139] The absence of a qualifying phrase "who reject me" would seem to underwrite injustice.[140] It would seem that declaring the unqualified פָּקַד-*phrase* as part of constant divine character and enduring divine way almost guarantees the misinterpretation of divine punishment as sometimes "undisciplined and well beyond the enactment of sanctions" (271). While the issue is difficult to solve completely, the following considerations remove much of the tension.

(1) Rashi's suggestion may be helpful. Rashi holds that the elimination of the qualifying expression "who reject me" (from Ex 20) is inconsequential.[141] It is declared once in the Decalogue and is now assumed in "the third and fourth" of the formula of 34:6-7. Thus, Sarna's interpretation of the פָּקַד-phrase still may apply here: "The verdict applies only when subsequent generations perpetuate the evils of their parents,"[142] both in the Decalogue and in the formula. Even if this view is not satisfactory, there are other factors that remove the issue of apparent injustice involved in the פָּקַד-phrase in 34:7.

(2) The golden calf episode shows the restricted, momentary nature of divine punishment. While Israel as a whole is indicted and found guilty in God's eyes, only part of Israel receives punishment in 32. The partial punishment meted out greatly falls short of the deserved punishment. This is evidence that the LORD's punishment is not only well disciplined and well within the enactment of pre-stated sanctions, but it is also merciful. In this contextual understanding of the פָּקַד-phrase of 32:6-7, the removal of the qualifying terms "who reject me" is in effect made inconsequential (as with view 1).[143]

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[139] Levine 1993: 367.

[140] Milgrom (1990: 111) suggests that the meaning of the פָּקַד-*phrase* is attenuation of the "punishment by distributing it over a number of generations." He then suggests that the collective retribution allowed in Ex 34:7 is corrected in Deut 5:9-10; 7:9. He says, "Deuteronomy reinterprets this attribute to mean that God will punish (or bless) succeeding generations only if they follow in the ways of the fathers." But it seems that those passages in Deuteronomy are simply recapitulating what is found in the Decalogue in Ex 20, rather than reinterpreting Ex 34:6-7.

[141] Rashi on Ex 34:7.

[142] Sarna 1991: 111.

[143] Again, I am assuming the canonical order and relationship of texts in my interpretation of them.

(3) Another way to interpret the פָּקַד-phrase is to understand the "third and fourth" as a reference to the entire household, which in the ancient world would comprise three or four generations.[144] In such a setting, there is inevitably mutuality and corporality in conduct, responsibility, and consequences.[145] This may be related to the contaminating and disseminating effects of sin that bring guilt not only upon the one committing sin but to the whole community.[146] In a context in which the entire Israel is found guilty before God, the qualifying terms "who reject me" would be irrelevant. Sarna's comment on this dual aspect of "third and fourth" is helpful:

> The Israelite conception of itself as a community bound to God by a covenant has dual implications. Society is collectively responsible for its actions, and the individual too is accountable for behavior that affects the life of the community. There is thus forged a mutuality of responsibility and consequences. It is further recognized that contemporary conduct inevitably has an impact upon succeeding generations. These historical effects are perceived in terms of God 'visiting the sins' of one faithless generation upon the next or of His 'showing kindness,' that is, rewarding fidelity, far into the future.[147]

Thus in the case of the exodus community, the entire nation of Israel incurs guilt (although the text seems to point out that not everyone actively participated in the idolatry, such as the three thousand Levites). Accordingly, the LORD responds to Israel collectively, threatening to destroy Israel collectively. Only, in the narrative of 32-34, the LORD in his grace and compassion punished only part rather than the whole (in the plague and the slaughter by the Levites). This however does not necessarily negate that the LORD punishes collectively (see Chapters 3-5). But the fact that the LORD only punished part in Ex 32-34 when the whole is found guilty points to the fact that divine punishment, even if collective, is tempered by mercy. God's lenient punishment is related to divine sin-bearing. In this

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[144] See Jer 23:34 and the punishment of Achan and his household in Num 7:24-25.
[145] Sarna 1991: 110. See Trible 1978: 1-2 on "the corporate personality of a household that bound all members in the solidarity of transgression."
[146] See Milgrom 1990: 446 for the contaminating effect of sin on the sanctuary.
[147] Sarna 1991: 110.

particular context of 32-34, the LORD bears the brunt of sin and punishment so as not to punish Israel harshly.

(4) There is yet another kind of "collectiveness" in Israel's understanding of its identity. That is, Israel as God's covenant people and partner is conceptualised as an entity in its relationship with God from the time of the exodus through the exile and onto the restoration. Thus, Israel is conceived as a mere child at the time of the exodus who matures into "womanhood" and "marries" God, only to be "divorced" by God at the time of the exile (Deut 32:18; Isa 54:6; Hos 3:1; 11:1). The punishment of sin is deferred until the "adulthood" of the nation. When idolatry and corruption worsen and the repentance of Israel and the love of God are not forthcoming (despite the many disciplinary and purifying punishments along the way), the adulterous "adult" Israel is held accountable and punished. Understood in this way, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and their children to the third and fourth generation," although possible, does not necessarily mean that the LORD punishes the exiled community for all the sins ever committed and unpunished from the time of the exodus.[148] But it can be understood as conveying the deferment of punishment until the appropriate or ripe time; ripe both in terms of the maturity of the nation and the "maturity" of sin. In this way, the פָּקַד-phrase can be understood as also expressing postponement of punishment, to which now I turn.

(5) Levine suggests, "There is currency to the notion that God does not always bring the evil in the lifetime of the perpetrator, but defers it as a concession."[149] The following shows how "deferral of punishment and its visitation on the second, third, or fourth generation" [150] can be perceived as a merciful act:

> God's kindness lasts a thousand generations, whereas deferral of punishment has a statute of limitations, we might say. If God can be persuaded to extend

[148] The fact that the LORD punished only partially and gradually may point to the possibility that the exilic community does receive stored up punishment for some ancient sins and contamination (see above).
[149] Levine 1993: 367.
[150] Levine 1993: 381.

> his grace beyond the fourth generation, Israel will not be punished for ancient sins![151]

This interpretation suggests that the deferral of punishment voiced in 32:34: "When the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin," may be an act of divine kindness.[152] It allows the life of Israel to continue and also the opportunity for Israel to repent (שׁוּב) and *possibly* not be punished at all.[153] Such postponement to punish can be seen as an aspect of what it means that the LORD is a compassionate and gracious God.

It is noteworthy that in the announcement of the deferment of punishment in 32:34, there is no oath formula (cf. Num 14:21,28), confirming that it is a postponement of punishment rather than an irrevocable decision. The sad truth is, as Num 14 shows, that Israel continues to rebel against the LORD and does bring upon itself the deferred punishment. Israel incurs punishment in Num 14 not because of the enduring nature of divine punishment (because with repentance and faithfulness, the LORD can be persuaded not to punish). Israel is punished because of its repetitive, repulsive, and unrepentant sin. What is striking in Num 14 is that in his mercy God allows "the conquest of Canaan to proceed, albeit with some delay."[154] By extending the period of punishment, the LORD allows for the emergence of a new Israel that can conquer the promised land (see Chapter 3).

(6) Finally, certain changes in theological emphasis are evident in the removal of the qualifying phrases from the חֶסֶד- and פֹּקֵד–phrases and in the relocation of the חֶסֶד-,

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[151] Levine 1993: 381. This seems to imply that if the subsequent generations continue and exacerbate ancient sins and fail to repent, then they might be punished for their own and their ancestors.

[152] Levine 1993:381.

[153] Milgrom (1990: 393) points out, "The prophets taught that repentance (*shuv*) not only averts punishment (see Jer 18:7-11; Joel 2:13-14; Jon 3:10) but eradicates sin (note the verbs: *mahah*, 'erase,' in Isa 43:25; 44:22; Jer 18:23; *hilbin*, 'whiten,' in Isa 1:18; *rafa'*, 'heal,' in Isa 6:10; Hos 14:5; *hishlikh*, 'cast [into the sea],' in Mic 7:19). Therefore, the person who has truly repented need not fear that he will ever face divine retribution for his sin . . . since his sin no longer exists." However, this seems to be the case only when repentance follows divine warning (as in Jonah) or when divine punishment has already been sufficiently meted out (as in Hos 14:4[5] or Isa 43:25). In the case where there is an indictment of unpunished sin, even if a genuine repentance follows, it does not guarantee aversion of all divine punishment, especially when divine punishment is part of the divine means of eradicating or atoning for the sin indicted (as in 2 Sam 12:13-14).

[154] Levine 1993: 381.

נַקֵּה-, and פֹּקֵד–phrases from Ex 20 to Ex 34. The חֶסֶד-phrase and the punitive נַקֵּה- and פֹּקֵד –phrases are detached from the context of the laws (despite 34:10ff) and are declared to be aspects of the divine attributes. Having been removed from the strictly legal or "contractual" context of the Decalogue, the terms are put in the context of God's compassion and grace shown in freedom. This does not imply that the contractual dealings are entirely irrelevant. Divine חֶסֶד and פֹּקֵד (and נַקֵּה) are still expressions of the jealous God who will reward and punish according to human deeds. But the new context implies that the divine freedom to show compassion and grace will now take precedence over the contractual. The compassionate and gracious God is also a jealous God, but the rewarding and punitive expressions of that jealousy will be now tempered by the LORD's compassionate and gracious nature. Otherwise, Israel will be destroyed immediately (33:5) and never experience divine love. The abiding validity of the contractual expression of divine חֶסֶד and פֹּקֵד, but now within the new context of compassion, is seen in the fact that the LORD strongly emphasizes the divine name jealousy in the renewed covenant that immediately follows the declaration of the divine attributes (34:14).[155] That is, in the context of the LORD's decision to grant mercy, the LORD still insists on the necessity of obedience and faithfulness on the part of his covenant people. Those who continue in their evil ways and take for granted the LORD's compassion and grace will ultimately be destroyed, which is what Num 13-14 shows (see Chapter 3).

These many ways of interpreting the פֹּקֵד-phrase in 34:6-7 may point to the theological richness of the expression. If so, insisting on a univocal interpretation of the phrase may lead to unnecessary misinterpretations of it here and elsewhere in the Old Testament.

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[155] Margaliot (1994: 49) sees "the lack of balance—between the two series of divine attributes in 34:6-7. . . if only for the reason that the first series only is often quoted." He continues: "Having read these attributes, the Israelite might conclude that the LORD is altogether far more a compassionate God than one who metes out punishment—and thereupon would act accordingly, always expecting, in spite of his transgressions, the LORD to react leniently." He (50) therefore sees אֵל קַנָּא in v.14 as "a necessary theological complement to his predominant attributes of mercy in v.6-7."

Leaving behind the issue of the meaning of the פֹּקֵד-phrase, now I turn to the issue of the compatibility of divine mercy and judgment/punishment in the פֹּקֵד-phrase in relation to the rest of the formula.

4.6.2. The Compatibility of the נַקֵּה- and פֹּקֵד-Phrases and Divine Mercy

There are several ways in which the compatibility between divine judgment/punishment and mercy/forgiveness can be found in the formula in its context.

4.6.2.1. In the Contrast between "Third and Fourth" and "Thousands"

Whatever meaning is applied, a clear contrast is made between "third and fourth" and "thousands," that is, between "God's boundless beneficence and the limited extent of His punishment,"[156] between divine pleasure in giving blessing and divine reluctance to punish. When divine punishment to the "third and fourth" generations is placed side by side with the boundless covenant love, which extends to thousands of generations (34:7), divine mercy is remarkably stressed.[157] The emphasis, therefore, should be placed on the incomparability and unlimited character of God's loving kindness that extends collectively to thousands or to an unlimited number of future generations, rather than on the fact that God sometimes punishes collectively, especially when that collective punishment is entirely just. This point is further emphasized by the fact that the punitive companion-phrases (נַקֵּה and פֹּקֵד) are now set in a new noncontractual context of divine prerogative and freedom to be compassionate and gracious. The new emphasis is also indicated by the order in which the phrases now occur—steadfast covenant love (חֶסֶד) first and punishment second (נַקֵּה- and פֹּקֵד-phrases). As Sarna remarks, "As opposed to the order in the Decalogue (20:5-6), emphasis and priority here are given to God's magnanimous qualities rather than to His judgmental actions."[158] Part of what this means is that God will not

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[156] Sarna (1991: 111) credits certain rabbis for this insight (see Mekhilta de-R. Ishmael, at Ex 20:6).
[157] This point is seen especially in the fact that the punishment was mitigated largely due to the LORD's own "bearing" (נָשָׂא) of the sins, iniquities, and transgression of the sinful nation. This is accompanied by some form of holding the sinner responsible (נַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה), i.e. avenging (פֹּקֵד) them within the merciful bounds of the set limit of third and fourth generations.
[158] Sarna 1991: 216.

necessarily punish to the third and forth generation for God has the freedom not to do so. The fullness of what this means has already been mentioned above in the discussion of God's freedom to be merciful (and also in the discussion on the deferred punishment). This leads to my next point.

4.6.2.2. In the Moderation of Divine Punishment by Divine Mercy

The two phrases נַקֵּה and פֹּקֵד, then, together express the idea that God is a jealous God and that God holds the guilty responsible for sin committed by punishing the sinner mercifully within a set limit, that is, upon a maximum of three or four generations. Again, the cause for this mitigated form of punishment is largely due to the LORD's own "bearing" (נֹשֵׂא) of the iniquity, rebellion and sin, and the punishment for the nation. In this, divine mercy (in sin "bearing" and forgiving) and divine judgment (in punishment of sinners) function together in a manner in which they are inseparable and indivisible. *Divine judgment/punishment is tempered by divine mercy/forgiveness.*

This interpretation that vengeance is moderated by mercy stands in contrast to those of other theological interpreters, both contemporary and from the past. A passage from Brueggemann constitutes his objection to this interpretation. He says:

> Yahweh takes affront (as in the case of Aaron in Exodus 32) *very seriously, so seriously* as to affect the relationship for *as many as four generations*... It is "iniquity" that is visited on subsequent generations, the very same iniquity that is pardoned. . . . It alerts Israel to the reality that Yahweh's full character is not subsumed under Yahweh's commitment to Israel in solidarity.[159]

This, however, does not point to a contradiction in God's character and actions as Brueggemann thinks it does. God punishes Israel precisely because God is committed to purifying Israel in covenant love. As I have already shown, God has the freedom to judge and punish *the very same* iniquity that he bears and forgives. This is especially clear when judgment takes the form of partial punishments or disciplinary chastisements.

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[159] Brueggemann 1997: 217; italics mine.

4.6.2.3. In the Disciplinary Nature of Divine Punishment

The disciplinary nature of divine punishment is another way in which the compatibility of divine judgment and mercy can be seen. Disciplinary punishment serves a crucial function of purifying the Israelites so that the Holy One of Israel may continue to dwell among them without utterly destroying them.[160]

Against my view, John Calvin argues that the punishment phrases of Ex 34:7b refer to severe judgment for "the reprobate and obstinate," whereas mercy is only for the repentant "regenerate."[161] This would rule out the idea that God's punishment might take the form of instructional "discipline" of sinners, either before or after the forgiveness of sins.[162] Calvin's perspective may apply better on the individual level rather than on the corporate level that is dominant in Ex 32-34. From the perspective of the individual within the sinful nation who is struck down (as by the Levites in 32:27ff or by the plague in 32:35), the LORD's avenging would seem retributive and final rather than disciplinary. But from the corporate or national perspective, partial punishment serves a disciplinary and purifying purpose.

Divine discipline is essential for the continued presence of God among the people of Israel. In fact, partial punishment would serve as a representative demonstration not only of God's righteousness that judges and avenges the sin, but also of God's unmatched mercy that forgives and even blesses the sinful majority (34:10ff). Thus, God's merciful punishment confirms God's incomparable steadfast love and faithfulness (וְרַב־חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת) that is bestowed on sinful Israel and will continue to be bestowed on its descendants.

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[160] When the people are made holy by punishment, God can continue to show his faithfulness by being with them as their God.

[161] His reading does not pay sufficient attention to the way the meaning of the phrase is illuminated by its context in 32-34.

[162] Calvin 1950 (*Moses* vol. 3): 387-388.

God's purpose in discipline is further displayed in the context of renewal of the covenant with Israel in 34:9ff. The fact that God chooses to renew the covenant after Israel's ultimate rebellion shows that God in unmatched mercy forgives and even blesses sinful Israel (34:10ff). But such forgiveness is not without a demand for Israel's responsible action. God emphatically warns Israel not to repeat the same sin of idolatry for the LORD will punish it (34:14).[163] The covenant with God (34:10ff.) is to preclude and override any covenant with the inhabitants of the land or with their gods.[164] If Israel were to become idolatrous like the foreign nations, then Israel will also be punished. Therefore, the LORD gives strict admonitions "regarding the incursions of foreign cults into the religion of Israel."[165]

God's jealousy warns Israel against future apostasy in view of the past apostasy of the golden calf. If the Israelites would now recall the partial punishment they had already experienced, it would serve as a negative incentive not to sin again. As such, God's patient discipline in the past would mercifully help Israel to avoid further and potentially more serious sin and punishment in the future. God's merciful judgment is therefore meant to inspire holy obedience in Israel as an important part of its future relationship with God. The call to holiness is intricately related to divine holiness, to which now I turn.

4.6.2.4. In the Divine Attribute of Holiness and in Israel's Call to Holiness and Mission

In Exodus, the LORD reveals himself to be holy. Because the LORD is holy, those who are set apart to God become holy: "I am the LORD who makes you holy" (Ex 31:13). God "separated Israel to himself as a holy people and sanctified them."[166] Being set apart as holy by the virtue of election and covenant with God, Israel is then called to maintain its identity as a holy people: "You will be to me a holy people" (Ex 22:31).

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[163] The threat is implicit in the declaration; "for the LORD whose name is jealous is a jealous God." The term "jealous" directs the attention to Ex 20:5, where the "jealous" God promises punishment for idolatry.
[164] Davies 1967: 247.
[165] Sarna 1991: 217.
[166] Childs 1979: 185.

The pursuit of holiness is inextricably associated with Israel's God-given mission to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ, 19:6) to other nations.[167] Sarna points out:

> [T]he priest's place and function within society must serve as the ideal model for Israel's self-understanding of its role among the nations. The priest is set apart by a distinctive way of life consecrated to the service of God and dedicated to ministering to the needs of the people.[168]

Accordingly, Israel as a kingdom of priests is called to minister to the cultic needs of the nations. As Brueggemann correctly states, Israel is to be a "mediator and intercessor for the well-being of the other nations of the world."[169]

The question is: How should Israel pursue holiness and fulfil its mission to the nations? Israel can only do so by keeping the covenant and having the presence of the holy God in its midst. It is telling that one of the clearest statements about Israel's identity and mission is prefaced by the conditional clause: "Now *if* (וְעַתָּה אִם) you obey me and keep my covenant, you will be to me a treasured possession among all the nations" (Ex 19:5; italics mine). In addition, the instruction for and building of the tabernacle immediately follows the covenant-making. By keeping the covenant and worshipping the holy God, Israel reflects the holiness of the God who is in its midst.[170]

The fact that the golden calf episode (Ex 32-34) interrupts the tabernacle material is theologically significant. The crisis of apostasy demonstrates the fundamental incompatibility between a holy God and an unholy people. Following this idolatry, the divine presence is moved away from Israel's camp and the project of the tabernacle is postponed until the problem of Israel's unholiness is resolved. A holy God will not dwell among an unholy people.

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[167] Sarna 1991: 104.
[168] Sarna 1991: 104.
[169] Brueggemann 1997: 431.
[170] Sarna (1991: 104) rightly points out, "Holiness is to be achieved by human imitation of God's attributes." Part of Israel's imitation of God's attributes involves Israel's separation from all that is unholy, including idolatry, and embrace of a righteous lifestyle as delineated in the covenant law.

The golden calf event also underscores the fact the holy God who delivered Israel out of Egypt with "an outstretched arm and with mighty judgments" (Ex 6:6) will turn the same "arm" and "judgment" against his own people if and when they break the covenant and become unholy.[171] That a holy God dwells among Israel and that Israel has embraced this God can have destructive consequences for Israel. When Israel falls into apostasy and stands in opposition to the Holy One of Israel, Israel can expect certain purifying actions from the LORD. This purifying presence of God is related to the description of God as "fire."

The image of "fire" (אֵשׁ) is frequently used in Exodus to describe the manifestation of God's presence (Ex 13:21; 19:18; 24:17). The fact that the holy God has come to dwell among an otherwise unholy nation may explain this particular manifestation of the LORD's presence (see Ex 19:9-25; 20:18-21). In the case of apostasy, such as in Ex 32, the holiness of God can consume the apostate (Ex 32:10-12).

Some clarifications need to be made. (1) Although the LORD comes as "fire," this does not necessarily imply that God always imposes the process of purification. By choosing to embrace the holy God and his holy ways, God's people can live in peace with God and without the fear of God unleashing his consuming fire. With election come privileges and responsibilities. Depending on how the elect respond, these privileges and responsibilities can bring either blessings or curses.[172] This point is apparent in other passages examined in this thesis. (2) Although the LORD has the right to fully unleash his consuming fire against the unholy people, the LORD also has the freedom to temper justice with mercy. That is, where sin demands full retribution, the LORD has the prerogative to choose to show compassion and mercy, delimiting the extent of punishment. This point is

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[171] Childs (1979: 185) rightly states, "Israel does not achieve a state of holiness by performing duties. Holiness is not a process to be won. . . . However, holiness can be forfeited by contamination with the profane. By keeping the divine commandments Israel responds obediently to her status as an elect, holy nation."

[172] Gowan (1994:221) draws attention to Amos 3:2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities."

related to the ultimate purpose of divine punishment. God judges and punishes ultimately for the purpose of salvation.[173] As Brueggemann rightly states, "creation is under curse for disobedience, and Yahweh insistently wills that the world should be brought to blessing."[174] Through grace and blessing, and judgment and punishment, the holy God establishes a righteous people of God among whom he dwells.

5. Concluding Remarks

The contextual, theological interpretation of the formula shows that God's acts are consistent with the truth-claims about God made in Ex 34:6-7. This is because the formula and the context have a mutually interpretative relationship. They provide each other with crucial interpretive keys that delimit the possibilities of meaning for the text and its context.[175]

There is a mutually interpretative relation between the formula (or its echoes) and its context. The formula interprets the context, giving understanding of how divine actions are determined by particular attributes of God. Conversely, the context sheds light on how the generalisations about God in the formula are specifically worked out or demonstrated in divine action.

In this chapter, I have shown the following through my contextual interpretation of the formula. The Israelites demonstrate that from the birth of the nation the inclination of their heart was evil. In this context, God reveals most powerfully the divine "way" of overcoming the problem of human sins through the LORD's own compassionate and gracious nature. In the context of 32-34, all of the attributes are powerfully declared as expressions and applications of divine goodness. Ultimately, one should not speak of positive and negative sides of God because all aspects of God are positive manifestations of

[173] God makes Israel holy through chastisement, punishment, and purification. By making Israel holy, the holy God can continue to dwell among and bless Israel and let Israel fulfil its mission to the nations.
[174] Brueggemann 1997: 432.
[175] Fretheim 1991: 24.

God's goodness and glory. The nature of divine compassion and grace is divine freedom; divine freedom specifically talked about as God's prerogative to be compassionate and merciful to those who deserve destruction.

Divine freedom to be compassionate and merciful is first expressed in divine patience, steadfast covenant love, and divine sin-bearing. In God's freedom to show compassion and mercy to those that deserve death, the LORD reconciles Israel. But within that decision to maintain covenant love and faithfulness to Israel, the LORD brings disciplinary punishments upon Israel. God is committed to Israel in all that God is, which includes righteous judgment. The LORD judges and punishes Israel to discipline and purify Israel, and to spur obedience and holiness.

This means, judgment is an expression of God's compassion and grace *for his covenant people*. Divine judgment and punishment are not alternatives to divine patience, faithfulness, truth, and forgiveness. Rather, they all function together as integral parts of God's goodness, compassion, and grace. Divine discipline or temperate judgment and punishment are integral parts of that goodness of God that is all for God's people. God's merciful punishment therefore does not undercut or contradict God's mercy and forgiveness, but rather sustains them.[176] It sustains them because God's intention is for Israel to be a holy people standing in a righteous relationship with God.[177] To this end, all of God's attributes will remain constant and united in all of God's dealings with his people. The portrayal of God in this important portion of Exodus is not self-contradictory and dualistic but united and self-consistent.

[176] Childs 1992: 373.
[177] Childs 1992: 373.

CHAPTER 3:

THE ECHOES IN

NUMBERS 14:18

17 וְעַתָּה יִגְדַּל־נָא כֹּחַ אֲדֹנָי כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ לֵאמֹר׃
18 יְהוָה אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפָשַׁע
וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים
עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים׃
19 סְלַח־נָא לַעֲוֹן הָעָם הַזֶּה כְּגֹדֶל חַסְדֶּךָ וְכַאֲשֶׁר
נָשָׂאתָה לָעָם הַזֶּה מִמִּצְרַיִם וְעַד־הֵנָּה׃

17 Now, then, let the power of my Lord be great as you have declared, saying:

18 **The LORD is slow to anger,**[1]
great in covenant love,
bearing/forgiving iniquity and rebellion.
Yet, not altogether clearing the guilty,
he visits the iniquity of the fathers
upon the children and the children's children
to the third and the fourth generation.

19 Please ***forgive the iniquity*** of this people according to your great **covenant love**, just as you have **borne/forgiven** this people from Egypt until now.

[1] Words in regular boldface type represent quotations from Exodus 34:6-7, while words in italics boldface type represent allusions. For textual and translational notes, see Chapter 2 and the exegetical section of this chapter.

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Chapter and Its Argument

In this chapter, I turn to a discussion of Numbers 14:18, again interacting critically with Walter Brueggemann's comments on this passage. In canonical order, Num 14:18 is the first echo of the formula found in Ex 34:6-7. Despite Brueggemann's claim that Num 14:18 is a complete echo or quotation, it is a significant but partial echo (falling into the sub-category of an incomplete quotation). Aided by an atomistic (non-contextual) methodology, Brueggemann makes several unsubstantiated claims about the passage and about the character of God that need to be corrected. Brueggemann's claims and my critical response to them are similar to what is found in the last chapter with regard to Ex 34:6-7. But there are also some new issues that are specific to the echo in Num 14:18 and Brueggemann's interpretation of it.

In section 1, I will start out by briefly summarising Brueggemann's comments on Num 14. In section 2, I will clarify the nature and extent of the strong echo in Num 14:18 and of the weak echoes in 14:19. In section 3, I will then turn to the literary and theological context of Num 14, highlighting Israel's sin as a theological theme the literary context of Num 14 emphasizes.

In section 4, I will turn to the "centre" of the chapter, the contextual-theological exegesis of the passage in which the echo in Num 14:18 is found. Moving from Moses' intercession (subsection 4.1) to God's response to Moses (subsection 4.2), I will clarify the functions of the echo in Num 14:18. In the course of this discussion, I will seek to correct Brueggemann's misleading claims about both Moses' intercession and God's response. I will also critique Brueggemann's underlying presupposition that mercy/solidarity and judgment/sovereignty are, at least after Num 14:21, separated and mutually exclusive (see more below). In respect to these topics, I will seek to demonstrate how a close reading of the text does not lead to the conclusion that God is inconsistent in dealing with human

demands, contrary to Brueggemann's claims. In fact, from a canonical perspective, divine punishment in Num 14 can be seen as disciplinary and purifying in character, thereby underscoring the constant and harmonious nature of the divine character.

Finally, in section 5, I will conclude the chapter by giving a brief summary of the main theological insights I gained in this chapter. I will state the important similarities between the affirmations of Ex 32-34 and those of Num 14. I will also highlight a few specific contributions that Num 14 makes to an understanding of divine mercy and judgment, which are not emphasized in Ex 32-34.

1.2. The Problem Stated: Brueggemann on Numbers 14:18

In this subsection I will show that Brueggemann's overall treatment of Num 14:18 involves the problematic conjunction of two alternate interpretations of God's solidarity (associated with God's positive mercy) and sovereignty (associated with God's negative judgment). In his view, (a) solidarity and sovereignty converge or coexist to some extent in the earlier part of this passage and then, after 14:21, (b) they part company and have nothing to do with each other. The question is whether these two interpretations are found in the text or whether Brueggemann is misreading the text so as to find them in the text.

As mentioned above, Brueggemann starts out his discussion with an inaccurate assessment on the extent of the echo of Num 14:18. He makes the observation that "Num 14:18 is the recital of Exod 34:6-7 quoted in its *entirety*" (270; italics mine)[2] when in fact Num 14:18 is a partial quotation. Elsewhere he refers to Num 14:18 as "a direct and *complete* quotation of Exod 34:6-7" (219; italics mine). This mistake could be overlooked if there were not more problems that emerge in relation to it.

Brueggemann goes on to paint the following theological portrait of Num 14:18 and its immediate context. To begin with Brueggemann says that "Yahweh's patience with Israel is exhausted" after Israel's rebellion (219). God now threatens to destroy Israel,

[2] Here and in all other parenthetical citations in this chapter will be Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997).

"proposing to disregard" his "self-commitment to Israel made at Sinai" (219). Brueggemann says that God is now only capable of acting in "self-regard" or on his own behalf (219). In response, Moses "shames" the LORD by quoting the formula back to the LORD (v.18). Moses thus urges the LORD back to the baseline of his relationship with Israel, that is, his "self-commitment to Israel" (220). According to Brueggemann, although Moses quotes the formula "in its entirety" (including its negative second half), Moses' *true* intention "is to appeal to Yahweh's faithful solidarity with Israel (that is, to the first half of the formula)" (270). Moses' intention is expressed in "the imperative petition, 'forgive the iniquity of this people'" (270), in which Moses chooses not to stress divine punishment (220).

Brueggemann claims that, against Moses' intentions, "Yahweh will make intentional use of the *entire* quote from Exod 34:6-7 that Moses has reiterated" (271; italics mine). The LORD will act fully in Num 14 on both "solidarity/self-commitment to Israel" and "sovereignty/self-regard for God-self." As such, Brueggemann sees the initial encounter between God and Moses in Num 14 as "perhaps an exception to the use made of the paradigmatic characterization of Yahweh" (271).[3] In a sense, Brueggemann rightly seems to be suggesting that this passage testifies to a kind of convergence of righteousness/sovereignty and love/solidarity in God's relationship to Israel. That is, in Num 14:18, Brueggemann sees both solidarity and sovereignty, both of the "two inclinations of Yahweh" (227), to be *simultaneously* at work. Sovereignty and solidarity converge here—even if they are not harmonious. Therefore, the intense "ambiguity in Yahweh's life" (227) is at least resolved here in Num 14 in the sense that the LORD does not simply choose one alternative over the other in his response to Israel. Thus, Brueggemann explains that, in Num 14:

[3] According to Brueggemann, the predominant reuse of the formula either celebrates or appeals to divine mercy or solidarity (220f).

> Yahweh acts in faithful solidarity, as asked by Moses. But Yahweh *also* acts in fierce sovereignty, befitting the claim of Exod 34:7b. Except in the case of Caleb, the generation for which Moses intercedes receives *nothing* of Yahweh's generous solidarity (271; italics mine).

The above quotation shows that the convergence of solidarity and sovereignty in this passage does not remove the sharpness of the contradiction that Brueggemann sees between the two. In other words, Brueggemann finds in Num 14 both a convergence of solidarity and sovereignty and a tension between them. The divine forgiveness declared in v.20 is extended *only* to the younger generation, and not to the older generation. He says, "Yahweh's fierce sovereignty has won over Yahweh's compassionate solidarity" (271). In a sense, the simultaneous activation of both divine solidarity and sovereignty only sharpens the contradiction Brueggemann sees as inherently present in Yahweh. In his view, if God acted in different ways in different contexts, then those different contexts might be able to explain God's different ways of acting.[4] But if God acts in two different ways in the same context, then we really have a substantial contradiction in Israel's rendering of God.

Therefore, when Brueggemann returns to Num 14:18 in another part of his volume,[5] he stresses the contradiction in the LORD's character to such a degree that he removes altogether the element of convergence between solidarity and sovereignty. This second more extreme interpretation of the same passage occurs in the section entitled "The Tension of Sovereignty and Loyalty" (307-311) and represents God's overarching character (especially in Israel's core testimony) in his *Theology*. In other words, the second interpretation reinforces and intensifies the sense of contradiction in Yahweh that Brueggemann began to assert in his first interpretation.[6]

In this second interpretation of the passage, Brueggemann says that until the events narrated in v.20, the LORD's righteousness and covenantal loyalty do converge (307). The

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[4] As such, it could be seen as a "contextual contradiction" (see Goldingay 1987: 19ff and my comments in Chapter 1, section 4).

[5] Still part of "Israel's core testimony" in which his first interpretation of Num 14 is given.

[6] See my comments on Brueggemann's "tacking" method in Chapter 1, section 3 and again below.

convergence in v.20 does not imply the harmonisation of divine characteristics, but rather two different kinds of action in the same situation. However, from v.21, "Yahweh's righteous will parts company from Yahweh's steadfast love" because "there is no spillover of graciousness outside of [the] embrace of Yahweh's righteous will" (307). "In this text there is not an ounce of room for steadfast love outside of adherence to Yahweh's commanding authority" (307). According to Brueggemann, where the LORD's punishment begins is where the LORD's "long-suffering fidelity" ends (307).

Such claims about Num 14:18 support the view that Brueggemann stated earlier with respect to the older generation of Israelites.

> Yahweh's fierce sovereignty has won over Yahweh's compassionate solidarity. . . . Yahweh, as uttered by Israel and confronted by Moses in this text, has as an inclination toward Israel a set of seemingly irreconcilable options. It is these options that give substance to the disjunction in the center of Israel's life and in the center of Yahweh's character (271).

How may I respond to Brueggemann's interpretation? To be sure, God's simultaneous response of "forgiveness" (סָלַח) and long-lasting punishment makes Brueggemann's claim look convincing. Yet a closer look at the passage shows that it is not. To begin with, Brueggemann's claim that Num 14:18 is a complete quotation of the formula (a view I contest) appears to be significant to his theological interpretation, as I will show below. One wonders in what direction he would have taken his discussion had he realised that many key theological terms are indeed *omitted* in Moses' quotation of the formula, giving it a particular theological emphasis.

Furthermore, Brueggemann shows almost no appreciation of the role of sin in the passage. The omission seems hard to justify in light of the immediate context, Num 13-14, which deals prominently with sin and the theologically indispensable role of sin in the understanding of divine mercy and punishment. Only in passing does he comment:

> To be sure, the formulations of Exod 34:7 and Num 14:18 indicate that Yahweh's potential enactment in rage is in response to and *correlated with*

> *"iniquity."* Thus there is something rational and disciplined about the fierce sovereignty (271; italics mine).

Brueggemann, however, does not integrate these observations into the rest of his discussion. Thus, the reality of human sin, specifically the sins of Israel in the context of this echo, is not adequately recognised or discussed. Without giving adequate consideration to sin, Brueggemann, not surprisingly, develops an exaggerated view of the "negative" side of God's nature, even seeing God act in an "unruly" manner in passages such as Nahum 1-2. Immediately proceeding the above quoted comments, Brueggemann says:

> Israel knows, however, in its various utterances about Yahweh, as in Nahum 1-2, that "visiting iniquity" seems sometimes to be undisciplined and well beyond the enactment of sanctions. This second half of the formulation bears witness to something potentially wild, unruly and dangerous in Yahweh's life (271).

As the above quotation shows, Brueggemann reads his radically negative reading of passages like Nah 1:3 into the interpretation of Ex 34:7b (and consequently Num 14:18). At least in part, then, Brueggemann improperly lets his interpretation of Nah 1:3 determine his interpretation of Ex 34:7b and Num 14:18 without due consideration of their respective literary and theological contexts.

Much more problematic in Brueggemann's interpretative practice is the simple equation he sees between Israel's specific experiences and the LORD's character. In Brueggemann's interpretation, the observation that the older generation supposedly experiences no mercy in a particular circumstance entails the assertion that mercy and judgment are irreconcilable and that this contradiction is at the centre of who God is. He makes a huge leap in reasoning by moving from a particular human experience to a statement about God's nature (apparently an ontological rather than strictly rhetorical statement). He does so without giving sufficient attention to the overall context of a particular divine response and a particular human experience.

Such an interpretative practice is related to Brueggemann's conviction that a biblical theology moves from the "particular" to the "general" (see Chapter 1, section 3). That is, Brueggemann takes the "particulars" of a text and builds theologies upon them, all the while keeping each particular separate from the other particulars. Since the particulars of Num 14 are forgiveness and punishment, when each of these is developed (in isolation from the other) into a full-blown theology, a contradictory or dualistic theology naturally results. Thus, Brueggemann's interpretative method leads to theological conclusions that cannot be contextually supported.

As noted in Chapter 1, from the outset Brueggemann is committed to a dualistic and deconstructive interpretation of a given text. Both of his interpretations of Num 14 (the moderate and more extreme ones noted above) are designed to deconstruct a view of God that emphasizes divine mercy more than divine judgment. Therefore, Brueggemann can assert that up to Num 14:20 divine mercy and judgment equally coexist in contradiction, but starting from v.21 one excludes the other still in contradiction. As a sailboat's tacking movement, both the first and second interpretations of Num 14 (going in somewhat different directions) contribute to his overall deconstructive aim (and thus ultimately move Brueggemann's interpretation in the same direction). Therefore, his two interpretations together emphasize the irreconcilable and contradictory nature of God's character.

The force of Brueggemann's argument relies heavily on the assumption that the text presents conflicting theologies. However, even if there are multiple sources behind a text, it is not necessary to assume that either the sources or the final form of the text contains irreconcilable views. A text should be tested carefully to see if it presents a coherent testimony about Israel and its God. In Brueggemann's interpretation, a text is quickly forced into his bipolar dialectic model, which he believes to be the key to his programme of deconstructing "traditional, hegemonic" views of God and the Bible. The main problem is

that, in his interpretation of Num 14:18, Brueggemann has again failed to give sufficient consideration to the theological relationship between a text and its context.

2. The Nature and Extent of the Echoes in Numbers 14:18-19

In the theological exegesis in section 4, I will discuss the function of the echo of Num 14:18 in its immediate context. One of the aims of this discussion is to test whether Moses' reuse of the formula has any continuity with the function of the formula in Exodus.[7] However, to accomplish this aim, I must establish the extent of the echoes and comment on the nature of the echoes. In speaking of the echoes, I refer to the literary or thematic features (phrases, terms, or motifs) in the formula that are repeated in Num 14:18-19. I will begin with a brief comment on the weak echoes found in Num 14:19, then turn to a more extended discussion of the strong echo in Num 14:18.

In Num 14:19, there are three weak, contextual echoes. סְלַח־נָא לַעֲוֹן "please forgive the iniquity" is an echo of סָלַחְתָּ לַעֲוֹנֵנוּ in Ex 34:9, and גדל חסד "great covenant love" and נשׂא "bear/forgive" are the echoes of the terms in Ex 34:6-7. These contextual echoes are closely related to the meaning and function of the term סלח, which in turn illuminates the function of the strong echo in Num 14:18 and the theological relationship between mercy and judgment in Num 14.

Numbers 14:18 as a whole constitutes a strong echo, a repetition of much of the formula. Since the strong echo in Num 14:18 repeats most of the formula, it will be more efficient to discuss what is omitted. There are five obvious omissions of phrases or terms in Moses' quotation of the formula in Num 14:18: (1) אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן "a God compassionate and gracious," (2) וֶאֱמֶת "faithfulness," (3) נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לָאֲלָפִים "keeping steadfast-love to thousands," (4) וְחַטָּאָה "and sin," (5) and וְעַל־בְּנֵי בָנִים "upon children of children."

[7] This aim corresponds to the second aspect of the thesis-statement I aim to defend in this thesis.

In the light of these omissions, it is remarkable that Brueggemann can claim that Ex 34:6-7 is "quoted in its entirety" in Num 14:18 (270). Brueggemann also says that Moses' intention in making a "complete quotation of Exod 34:6-7" is actually to appeal to divine mercy, glossing over the judgment "side" (270). Yet this reading of Brueggemann runs against the evidence that is provided by a correct understanding of the extent of the echo. The problem for Brueggemann's reading is that many terms that Brueggemann regards as belonging to the "mercy side" of the formula have been left out. Since much of the "positive side" is omitted, the natural conclusion (against Brueggemann) would be that Moses is trying to *reduce*, rather than accentuate, the formula's overall emphasis on mercy. One might even say that the length of the "positive side" is reduced to a size comparable to the "negative side," bringing more "balance" between divine mercy and judgment.

Yet as I have shown already in Chapter 2, a strictly dichotomous division of divine attributes into *either* mercy or judgment can be misleading. The divine self-revelation in Ex 34-6-7 is best understood in its context as a unit that reveals different aspects of divine goodness, each intricately related to the other. It was also shown that the terms associated only with mercy often assume divine wrath (e.g. patience presupposes wrath) and the terms of judgment presuppose mercy (e.g. "third and fourth" speaks of mercy that tempers judgment). In the exegesis that follows in the next section, I will show continuity between the perspective on the divine character in the echo in Num 14:18 and the theological perspective of Ex 34:6-7. However, I will now turn to the *nature* of the echo in Num 14:18.

The question of the nature of the strong echo can be addressed verbally and thematically. This corresponds to my definition of an echo in Chapter 1. On the verbal level, the echo in Num 14:18 is a quotation, a (probably intentional) repetition of key terminological and syntactical elements exactly or almost exactly as they are found in the

formula. There are omissions and other elements that could be regarded as "additions."[8] Yet these factors do not vitiate against the echo being a quotation, the strongest possible echo on the level of verbal correspondence to the formula.

On the thematic level, this echo involves a strong degree of thematic or theological correspondence to the formula, a point that much of my discussion below in section 4 is intended to defend. The text of Num 14:18 uses the same terms and syntax as the formula. This inclines me to reject the notion that Num 14:18 has a completely different meaning, theme, theological idea, or commitment than the formula. My position does not, however, rule out the possibility that Num 14:18 can bring the echoed terms into relationship with new themes. The old themes can have a new emphasis in a new context, and the old meaning can be further unveiled in a new context. Yet these changes in the "situation" of the echoed terms take place in the context of a basic continuity of theological themes with the formula.

3. Literary and Theological Context of the Echo in Numbers 14:18

3.1. Canonical Context of the Pentateuch

As stated in Chapter 1, both the larger canonical context and the immediate context of a text are crucial for discerning the theological meaning of a given text. In the case of Num 14:18, the Pentateuch is the larger canonical context and Num 13-14 the immediate interpretative (literary and theological) context. First I will briefly discuss a few relevant issues from the larger context of Pentateuch. Then in the next subsection I will turn to Num 13-14.

In *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New* (1985), Dennis Olson has shown that the entire Pentateuch provides a proper interpretative literary backdrop for the book of Numbers and for the narratives within it.[9] The narrative of "the spy story" in Num 13-14 is

[8] See the discussion below of the introductory phrase "let the power of the Lord be great" in 14:17.
[9] For independence of the books in the Pentateuch, see Gray 1927: xxiv.

viewed against the backdrop of "wilderness-wandering" stories in the Pentateuch. As Simon J. De Vries points out, the wilderness stories form a bridge between the stories of deliverance from Egypt on the one side and the stories of possession of the land on the other.[10] These stories illustrate the purpose of the LORD to test and purify (see Deut 8) the people of Israel that they may be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6).

Of special relevance within the wilderness stories is the so-called "murmuring tradition" or "rebellion stories."[11] A series of rebellion narratives picture Israel as repeatedly and defiantly rebelling against the LORD, beginning decisively with "Israel's fall story"[12] in Ex 32-34. These narratives present the Israelites as utterly rebellious and God as overcoming their rebellion through reconciliation.[13] As Andrew Tunyogi rightly states, such a motif is "at the heart of Israel's religion."[14] Therefore, the concept of sin, rebellion, or murmuring is an indispensable part of the Pentateuchal literary context. As such, rebellion and sin is the proper background against which our narrative of the rebellion of Israel must be studied.[15]

Reading Num 14 in the larger context of the "murmuring tradition" is especially important because the text (Num 14) makes it clear that the LORD's punishment on Israel is not just for the one-time episode of rebellion of which Num 14 provides an account. Rather, it is for "testing" the LORD "ten times" (Num 14:22) which may be understood as a conventional way of saying "many times"[16] or continually and repeatedly.[17] Israel is receiving deferred punishment for many accumulated sins, rather than being punished for one rebellious act. If so, Israel's sin is the rightful theological framework for the proper

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[10] De Vries 1968: 51. Engnell (1970: 207) identifies Rameses (Ex 12:37) as the point of departure for the wilderness wandering.

[11] See the extensive treatments by Coats (1968) and Tunyogi (1962 and 1969).

[12] Fretheim, 1991: 279.

[13] Tunyogi 1962: 385.

[14] Tunyogi 1962: 385.

[15] Tunyogi 1962: 385.

[16] Milgrom 1990: 110.

[17] Levine (1993: 368) takes "ten times" (זֶה עֶשֶׂר פְּעָמִים) as an idiomatic expression, expressing persistence and repetition. Ashley 1993: 260; "over and over." Cf. Budd 1984: 158; Sturdy 1976; 103.

understanding of divine jealousy or judgment and mercy in Num 14. Any theological framework for Num 14 that neglects the reality of sin will only lead to an impoverished and distorted understanding of God's mercy and judgment. I submit that this point is sufficiently illustrated by Brueggemann's work. Only a serious grappling with the nature of Israel's sins will lead to the rightful understanding of divine justice and mercy.[18]

3.2. Structural Analysis of Numbers 13-14

A. Exploration the land of Canaan by twelve spies (13:1-25)
B. Mixed report on the land (13:26-33)
    1. The factual report on the land (13:26-29)
    2. Caleb's confidence to conquer the land (13:30)
    3. Others' distorted report of the land (13:31-33)
C. The people's rebellion (14:1-10)
    1. Israel's "grumbling" against the LORD (14:1-4)
    2. Joshua and Caleb's intervention (14:5-9)
    3. Israel's readiness to stone the leaders (14:10)
D. The LORD's initial response to Israel (14:11-12)
E. Moses' intercession (14:13-19)
F. The LORD's final verdict in response to Moses' intercession (14:20-38)
    1. Forgiveness (סְלַח) granted (14:20)
    2. Older generations to perish in the wilderness (14:21-30)
    3. Younger generation made to suffer for forty years (14:31-35)
    4. Death of the ten spies (14:36-38)
G. Israel's rebellion and defeat (14:39-45)

3.3. The Immediate Narrative Context of Numbers 13-14

Many scholars have studied the "spy story" of Num 13-14 as a composite of sources[19] or as layers of history of tradition.[20] Brueggemann on the other hand appears to read the narrative as a composite of two or more irreconcilable theological testimonies (even though he does not attempt to identify any historical sources or traditions behind the story). In contrast, I will read the final form of the text as theologically coherent and meaningful, without assuming or proposing any particular scheme of tradition history or

[18] Tunyogi (1962: 385) comments that the narratives about the sinfulness of Israel illustrate "not the divine justice, but . . . the divine grace." I suggest that both divine justice and grace are equally seen in these passages, with justice functioning within grace.
[19] Van Seters 1994; Noth 1968; Gray 1927.
[20] Noth 1972: 130.

redaction history.[21] In other words I view the final form as providing a coherent and stable theological witness to who God is and what God is like. I will also show that this text's theological witness is consistent with the identity and character of God revealed in Ex 34:6-7 and its context.[22]

The story of Israel's rebellion in Num 13-14 begins with the scouts' exploration of Canaan and their reports. Initially, the spies give a factual report.[23] The land is indeed extremely fertile, "flowing with milk and honey" (13:27), and the people are powerful and the cities very large and fortified (v.28). Caleb then proclaims his confidence that the Israelites can indeed possess the land in an attempt to persuade the people to proceed with occupying the land (v.30). However, the ten spies make the people of Israel fearful with their "evil report" (דִּבַּת)[24] that is self-contradicting,[25] exaggerated, and frightening (v.31-33).

Choosing to believe the distortion, the entire community of Israel "as one person" (כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד, 14:15) responds in panic and bitter anger toward Moses and God. "All Israel" (v.1,2,10; cf. v.5,7) rally against Moses and Aaron and cry out: "O that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or in this wilderness, o that we had died!" (v.2). The Israelites accuse God of intending evil for Israel (v.3). Israel then intends to return to Egypt (v.4): "Let us head back for Egypt" (JPS).

Moses and other leaders plead with Israel not to rebel against the LORD. Joshua and Caleb especially speak out:

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[21] Gray (1927: 156) thought the text to be corrupt and unintelligible. See Newing 1987 for internal cohesion and integration of the narrative. Cf. Buis 1978.

[22] See the two aspects of the thesis I am defending (Chapter 1, subsection 1.2). For a fuller account of my methodological approach vis-à-vis Brueggemann's approach, see Chapter 1, subsections 3-5.

[23] Milgrom 1990: 104.

[24] Milgrom (1990: 106) points out that "*Dibbah* from the root *d-b-b*, 'to utter,' is a neutral term and originally had to be qualified by the adjective *ra'ah*, 'evil,' to indicate calumny (cf. Num 14:37; Gen 37:2). However, it eventually developed this negative connotation even when used without qualification (e.g. Num 14:36)."

[25] As Milgrom (1990: 104) says, "[T]hey unequivocally affirmed the land's fertility and abundant population (v.27-28)."

> **Num 14:7-9** The land . . . is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us into that land and give it to us, a land which is flowing with milk and honey. Only, do not rebel against the LORD. Do not be afraid of the people of the land because they are our bread. Their protection[26] is gone, and the LORD is with us.

Joshua and Caleb reassert the factual conditions of the land and of the LORD's presence with Israel. Yet Israel is unable to hear the truth and threatens to stone the leaders (v.10).[27] However, the LORD appears in his glory and intervenes (v.10).

The LORD's response in Num 14 parallels his response following the golden calf episode; the LORD threatens the destruction of Israel. The LORD says, "I will strike it with a plague and destroy it" (v.12).[28] As in Ex 32, the LORD's threat represents just punishment for the crime committed. Or as Jacob Milgrom puts it, God will deal with Israel's sin "measure for measure."[29] Since "all Israel" sinned as one entity against the LORD, the LORD's destruction of all Israel "as one person" would precisely fit the crime. God is not overbearing but just. This means that there is no room for questioning the LORD's righteousness either in his threat or in his punishments.[30]

As in Ex 32:10, the LORD also proposes to make Moses into "a nation greater and mightier than it" (Num 14:12). Yet Moses has no interest in becoming great (cf. Ex 32:11ff.). Rather, he is concerned about the LORD's reputation among the nations as being faithful and merciful in his dealing with Israel (Num 14:13-19; cf. Ex 32:11ff.).[31]

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[26] Hebrew צֵלָם literally means "shade, shadow" perhaps "a metaphor for divine protection, attested elsewhere (e.g., Pss 91:1, 121:5) and supported by the verb *sur me'al*, 'depart,' used of divine withdrawal (e.g., 1 Sam 28:15; Judg 16:20)" (Milgrom 1990: 109). See also Ashley 1993: 250; Levine 1993: 364.

[27] Perhaps Moses and Aaron, and Joshua and Caleb. Cf. Milgrom 1990: 109.

[28] Milgrom (1990: 109) suggests the translation "Let me" instead of "I will." He says, "The verb should be taken as cohortatives, equivalent to" what is found in Ex 32:10: "Let me be, that my anger may burn, etc." If so, the LORD here can be seen as "actually cuing Moses in his role as intercessor and intermediary," just as in Ex 32:10 (Milgrom 1990: 109).

[29] Milgrom (1990: 113) applies this expression not to the threat, but to the actual punishment pronounced and carried out against Israel (32:23ff.).

[30] This assumes the corporate nature of sin and punishment, so that even infants incur guilt and punishment by virtue of solidarity with sinning parents and by implication, contamination by their sin.

[31] Newing (1987: 220-221) subdivides these two concerns that Moses has into five elements which he sees correspond to "the five major theological motifs of the Pentateuch: exodus, presence, promise, revelation, and protection. Some of the rabbis believe that this term is an allusion to the guardian angel appointed over each nation, a belief that has firm support in Scripture (e.g., Deut 32:30-31)."

Consequently, Moses appeals to the greatness of God's character as revealed on Mt Sinai (Ex 34:6-7) and requests divine reconciliation (Num 14:19; see the discussion of the term סָלַח below). In response, the LORD "modifies his proposed judgment,"[32] reinforcing it with an oath. The defiant and rebellious older generation who were counted in the census and refused to take up the battle will die in the desert (v.29) while wandering there for forty years (v.34). Their children, too, will suffer, but they will ultimately inherit the promised land from the LORD.

After the pronouncement of divine judgment, the men who are responsible for spreading evil reports are immediately struck down (14:37). In addition, a large number of the Israelites "fall by the sword" (v.43) as they try to conquer the land in presumption (v.44f). Their defeat marks the beginning of the death of the older generation in the wilderness. De Vries helpfully explores the theological significance of this defeat. "The defeat before the Amalekites and Canaanites was allowed to stand as a judgment upon the entire episode."[33]

De Vries concludes from the defeat of Israel by its enemies "on the verge of entering the promised land" that God must have been exceedingly angry with Israel and Israel's sin must be interpreted as outright apostasy. Whatever the exact nature of Israel's sin, it must be sufficiently taken into account in order to draw a fair interpretation of the LORD's actions and character in this Chapter. I will now turn to the text's description of Israel's sin.

3.4. Israel's Sin in Numbers 13-14

The narrative of Num 13-14 plainly and amply testifies to the gravity of Israel's sin. Strong words are used to indict the Israelites for their manifold and grievous sins. I will highlight some of them here.

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[32] Newing 1987: 221.
[33] De Vries 1968: 57.

(1) Israel is found guilty of לוּן. The term לוּן occurs only in Ex 15-17, Num 14-17, Josh 9:18 and is usually translated as "murmur," "grumble," or "mutter." However, these translations are not satisfactory in drawing out the theological significance of the term. In this narrative, six times the term לוּן is used-four times by the LORD in Num 14:27,29 and twice by the narrator in v.2,36—to describe Israel's raising of its voices against the LORD in abusive accusation and bitter protest. The usual translations, "murmur" (Holladay), "grumbling" (NIV), "mutter" (JPS), and "complain" (NRSV), therefore, are not adequate for capturing the confrontational, condemnatory, and riotous nature of people's לוּן against the LORD, which is seen in the narrative (14:1-4).

In the narrative, Israel's לוּן consists of (a) "banding together against the LORD" (14:35), (b) a death wish (v.2), (c) "attributing an evil motive to the LORD"[34] (v.3), and (d) a wish to return to Egypt (v.4). (a) That "all" (כָּל, v.13:26; 14:1,2[twice],5,7,10) Israel like a mob "banded together against [the LORD]" (הַנּוֹעָדִים עָלָי, 14:35) to protest (לוּן) against the LORD "as one person" is clearly stated in 14:2 and well depicted throughout the narrative. (b) As Timothy Ashley states, by "wishing to have died in Egypt or in their journey thus far" Israel "implicitly denied Yahweh's salvation and providential care."[35] (c) The Israelites' grotesque accusation that God intends to kill them and enslave their wives and children shows Israel's "fundamental misunderstanding of Yahweh's character."[36] (d) Their intention to "appoint" (נָתְנָה) a new "leader" (רֹאשׁ)[37] and return to Egypt is anti-LORD and "anti-Exodus"[38] (v.4). Rashi points out that Rabbis understood the Israelites' intention to go back to pagan Egypt as an indication that they intended to turn to

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[34] Ashley 1993: 245.
[35] Ashley 1993: 245.
[36] Ashley 1993: 245.
[37] The JPS translates this as "Let us head back for Egypt." Alternatively, it can be rendered "We should choose a leader [i.e. a head]" (NIV). Milgrom (1990: 108) points out that "Hebrew *natan ro'sh*, literally 'set the head,' may be equivalent to *natan lev*, 'set the heart' or 'set the mind, decide' (cf. Ecc 1:13,17;cf. Neh 9:29). Alternatively, *natan*, in the sense of 'appoint' (e.g., Gen 41:41) would mean 'appoint a leader,' implying insurrection, a complete break with Moses—and with God (cf. v.9). For the defecting militia to succeed, new leadership would be required."
[38] Levine 1993: 377.

idolatry.[39] The "defecting militia" will need another leader if their return to Egypt is to succeed.[40] Thus, whatever the exact English equivalence, the term לוּן powerfully communicates bitter protestation, condemnation, and confrontation.

(2) The Israelites are indicted for "disbelieving (לֹא־יַאֲמִינוּ, 14:11) and "not listening" (וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ, v.22). They refuse to believe in the LORD's power that the LORD demonstrated through the signs and wonders in Egypt, in the wilderness, and at Sinai. Instead, they listen to the distortions of the ten spies (13:31-33; cf. 13:27-29). By not listening to the truth spoken by the two (13:30; 14:7-9), they end up disobeying (וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ, 14:22) the LORD's commandment to fight.

Thus, gripped by fear, deception, and anger, the Israelites refuse to fight the holy war. Instead, they are ready to fight and stone the LORD's leaders (14:10). By refusing to fight as the LORD's army, they in effect discharge themselves from the LORD's army. Thus, those who are twenty years old and older (14:29), who are of fighting age and counted in the first census (Num 1:3; cf. 14:29), are excluded from the promised land.

(3) In these various ways, the Israelites have "spurned," "rejected with scorn," (Holladay), or "despised" (RSV) (נָאַץ, 14:11, 23) the LORD.[41] The term נָאַץ points to Israel's utter rejection of the LORD. In rejecting the LORD, the Israelites are in effect also rejecting the promised land, their identity as Abraham's descendants and God's treasured possession (Ex 19:6), and indeed their covenant relationship with the LORD.[42] Their sin of נָאַץ is rooted in the Israelites' over-indulgence in an exaggerated sense of pettiness and in

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[39] Rashi (1930) on Num 14:4. Egypt, after all, was a land of idolatry, and their return there would amount to a rejection of Yahweh and his miraculous deliverance from Egypt. Alternatively, Levine (1993: 363) suggests "forming a column" for idol worship "because Hebrew *rosh* has this specialised meaning (Judg 7:16; 9:34, 43)."

[40] Milgrom 1990: 108.

[41] Sakenfeld (1975: 321) points outs that נָאַץ in the *piel* (as in Num and in 12 other occurrences Num 16:30; Deut 31:20; 1 Sam 2:17; 2 Sam 12:14; Isa 1:4; 5:24; 60:14; Pss 10:3, 13; 74:10, 18; Jer 23:17) refers "without exception to the despising or spurning of God or of something sacred to him." Levine (1993: 364) concurs with Sakenfeld when he says that the verb "seems to be reserved for the human-divine encounter. One 'spurns' God and his laws, just as God 'spurns' people in his wrath."

[42] Coats 1968: 146-48, points out that Israel here is refusing to be God's people; see also Sakenfeld 1975, 329.

their sudden forgetfulness of the unambiguous demonstrations of divine power and faithfulness. The LORD's display of his invincible power accentuates Israel's guilt of unbelief and contempt. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld points out from evidence elsewhere in the Old Testament that "despising" (נָאַץ) the LORD "is not a casual sin for which expiation can be made (1 Sam 2) or for which repentance will automatically remit the consequences (2 Sam 12)."[43]

(4) Israel is found guilty of "prostitution" (זְנוּת, 14:33).[44] As Ashley points out, "The verb *zana*, 'to engage in sexual relations outside of or apart from marriage,' and its derivative nouns (*zenunim*, *zenut*, etc.) are common words to describe apostasy and idolatry."[45] Ashley adds that the present context however "emphasizes lack of commitment and loyalty to Yahweh rather than loyalty to other gods."[46] Their present idolatrous intention to go back to Egypt, a land of idolatry, might also be in view.

(5) Lastly, the LORD judges Israel not only for the present rebellion, but also for all the past rebellions. Thus, the LORD charges Israel for "putting (God) to the test"[47] (נסה) "ten times" (עֶשֶׂר פְּעָמִים, 14:22), that is persistently and repeatedly,[48] or "over and over" again.[49] Ashley's insightful comment on "putting to the test" (נסה) is helpful here:

> In Exod.16 God 'tests' Israel by withholding food in the wilderness. By their dependence upon God (finally), Israel is proved to be faithful. Here, however, it is God who is 'tested' by Israel. God has already proved himself to be faithful and powerful many times by giving the divine presence (God's *glory*) and by working miraculous acts (God's *signs*) before Israel's eyes. Yet, the Israelites continue to 'test' God by disbelieving that he can bring the people into Canaan.[50]

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[43] Sakenfeld 1975: 322.
[44] Levine (1993: 370) takes a view that: "The verb *zanah* [literally] means to commit a harlotrous or improper sexual act (Lev 21:14; Deut 23:19)."
[45] Ashley 1993: 266, drawing from Phyllis Bird.
[46] Ashley 1993: 266.
[47] Holladay 1988.
[48] Levine 1993: 368.
[49] Ashley 1993: 260.
[50] Ashley 1993: 260.

The wilderness wandering tradition testifies to the fact that Israel's constant and repeated "testing" of the LORD involved all the sins delineated above: grumbling, complaining, protesting, accusing God of having evil motives, being abusive to God and leaders, rioting, rebelling, disbelieving, doubting, disobeying, despising, rejecting the LORD, and turning to idolatry. These are all the ways in which Israel tried and provoked the LORD "over and over." Rightly, then, the LORD refers to Israel as the "evil or "wicked community" (עֵדָה הָרָעָה, v.27,35).

As made plain in my discussion, Israel's sins are manifold and indeed grievous. The Israelites' sins cut "at the root of their relationship to God" and require God's righteous response.[51] The Israelites' continuous state of rebellion is the essential background to understanding the exchange between Moses and the LORD that occurs in Num 14:13ff.

4. A Contextual-Theological Exegesis of Numbers 14:18: The Theological Function of the Echoed Terms and the Question of Divine Constancy

With an understanding of the context, extent, and nature of the echo, I can now examine the function of the echo in Num 14:18 as quoted by Moses and acknowledged by the LORD in the narrative. In Ex 34:6-7, God revealed his attributes to Moses. In Num 14:18, Moses quotes from that divine revelation as a ground for his intercession for Israel whom God has threatened to destroy. Three key questions are raised by this reuse and will be answered in the course of my contextual-theological reading of the passage. (1) Is Moses' use of the formula in any way foreign or incompatible to its meaning and function as found in Ex 34:6-7? Specifically, does Moses' use of the formula ignore the judgment "side" of the formula as Brueggemann claims? (2) Is the LORD's implied use of the echo different from Moses' use of the echo? Specifically, does the LORD ignore the mercy "side"

[51] Sakenfeld 1975: 322.

of the formula? Put differently, do the terms of patience, love, and forgiveness have any real function in the LORD's dealing with Israel, particularly with the older generation? (3) Is there any consistency in the LORD's acts both in relation to Ex 34:6-7 and within Num 14? Most importantly, in the light of this passage, are God's acts of forgiveness and punishment compatible with each other or contradictory?

These questions will be answered in the course of analysing Moses' intercession and the LORD's response to it. I will first treat Moses' intercession which appeals to the greatness (גֹּדֶל) of the LORD's attributes revealed in Ex 34:6-7.

4.1. In Moses' Intercession: The Function of the Echoed Terms

Moses' intercession, of course, is precipitated by Israel's sin and the LORD's harsh but just response to the sins of Israel discussed above. As mentioned, Moses' intercession rests first and foremost with his concern for the LORD's reputation before the nations and especially before Egypt,[52] Israel's former oppressor and the great power of the day (v.13-15; cf. Ex 32:12). The concern for the LORD's reputation in Egypt and among the nations did not originate with Moses but with the LORD himself. It was the LORD's desire and purpose that the Egyptians will know that he is the LORD and that there is no one like the LORD, the God of Israel (Ex 6:2; 7:5,17; 8:22; 10:2; 12:12; 14:4,18). The LORD's purpose is to show his power so that his name will be proclaimed in all the earth. If the LORD destroys the people of Israel "as one person"[53] (or "all at one time" NRSV), then the nations who have heard about it will say, "Because the LORD is not able to bring this people into the land

[52] Although Egypt is the only nation mentioned in Num 14:13-14 (as in Ex 32:12), v.15 mentions "the nations who have heard about you." This corresponds to the more universal concern for God's reputation implied in Moses' comment in Ex 33:16b.

[53] The same idiom is used in Judg 6:16; 20:1, 8, 11; 1 Sam 11:7; 2 Sam 19:15; Ezra 3:1; Neh 8:1 (see Ashley 1993: 257).

he swore to give them, he has slain them in the wilderness" (14:16).[54] In other words, the nations would charge the LORD with impotence and cruelty.[55]

The nations stand to watch whether the LORD is indeed powerful enough to drive out the powerful residents in the land and give it to his people. Before the LORD can display to the nations his mighty deeds once again (by bringing his people to the land promised), the LORD must exert another kind of power--*the power to be patient, loving, forgiving, and disciplining*.

Therefore, Moses makes his request:

> Let the power of my Lord be great (יִגְדַּל־נָא כֹּחַ אֲדֹנָי) as you have declared,[56] saying "The LORD is slow to anger, great in covenant love, bearing iniquity and rebellion. Yet, not altogether clearing the guilty, he visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Moses requests that the LORD demonstrate his power (כֹּחַ) by no other way than revealing his merciful and just character[57] by (1) showing his patience, (2) steadfast love, (3) sin-bearing, and (4) merciful retribution.

However, the omission of such phrases as "a God compassionate and gracious," "faithfulness," "keeping steadfast-love to thousands" reduces the formula's abundant emphasis on mercy in its context of Ex 32-34. As Milgrom rightly states, "Since the formula is curtailed even more drastically elsewhere . . . it stands to reason that only those portions are quoted that are applicable to the situation."[58] If so, the omissions "are due to the particular nature of Moses' plea. He did not ask for the cancellation of punishment but only for its postponement."[59] The text gives no clear indication that Moses is asking the

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[54] Rashi fills out a potential scenario: The Egyptians would tell the inhabitants of Canaan that God was unable to being his people into the land because "the inhabitants of the land are strong and mighty" (Rashi on Num 14:16).

[55] Rashi on Num 14:14, 20. See also Ashley 1993: 257; Levine 1993: 365.

[56] As Sakenfeld (1975: 323) rightly recognises, the phrase "as you have said" "is clearly intended to refer to Ex 34:6-7."

[57] Cf. Ashley 1993: 257.

[58] Milgrom 1990: 111.

[59] Milgrom 1990: 111.

LORD to clear all consequences of sin from Israel at all. Rather, the LORD is being asked to be great in power to effect justice by punishing Israel appropriately.

This point is buttressed by two further observations. First, Moses does not make an unqualified protest against divine threat in Num 14 as he did in Ex 32:12. In Num 14, Moses says only, "If you put this people to death *as one person* . . ." (v.15). This shows that Moses' concern is probably not with the LORD's intention to put the rebels to death but with the all-inclusive, immediate, and final nature of their destruction "as one person" or perhaps "all at once" (NIV). Second, Moses quotes most of the second half of the formula about God's punishment (i.e. about not acquitting the guilty and visiting iniquity), which is the punitive side of the divine attribute "jealousy" (Num 14:18b; cf. Ex 34:7b).

Against Brueggemann, then, Moses' quotation from the judgment or jealousy side of the formula should not be written off as irrelevant on account of the interpreter's speculation about what Moses' real intentions are. It is true that Moses follows his quotation of the formula with a request for forgiveness (סָלַח) and loyalty: "Please forgive (סָלַח) the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast covenant love (חֶסֶד), just as you have borne/forgiven (נָשָׂא) this people from Egypt even until now" (v.19). This shows that Moses is concerned to ask for divine grace. Yet this does not necessarily mean that Moses regards divine jealousy and punishment as irrelevant or altogether excluded. As I already have shown in Chapter 2, divine mercy and jealousy are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Rather, within divine grace, there is room for the divine righteous will to punish the sinner, sometimes severely.

Thus, Moses' request is that God would show divine strength according to the way delineated in the LORD's self-revelation in the formula. This means all the divine attributes or characteristics mentioned in 14:18 —God's patience, love, sin-bearing, and

punishment—are expressions of the greatness of God's power in this context.[60] Thus, while the formula's great emphasis on mercy is somewhat reduced here in Num 14 (by way of omission of many terms), it is nevertheless powerfully present. Conversely, while v.19 appeals directly to the LORD's loyalty and forgiveness, the LORD's greatness in power to punish is equally accentuated.

I will now explain the four divine attributes in relation to the term כֹּחַ.

(1) The LORD's power is to be revealed specifically in restraining his punishing wrath, however justified that wrath may be. Hence, God's sovereign power is most closely related to God's patience (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם), the attribute with which the list of attributes opens.[61] Moses' request then is that the LORD exercises his power of patience by restraining from the immediate and utter destruction of his people.[62] This will overcome the surrounding nations' potential charge that the LORD destroyed Israel because the LORD lacked the power to deliver the promised land to Israel.[63] The LORD has already shown patience in many ways in Ex 32-34, and here by allowing Moses a chance to intercede for Israel.

(2) In addition to patience, God's sovereign power is to be displayed through God's great covenant love חֶסֶד. Moses here does not appeal explicitly to the Abrahamic covenant as he did in Ex 32; nevertheless such an appeal is implicit in the use of the attribute חֶסֶד. As already mentioned, חֶסֶד is closely tied to the LORD's covenant oath to Abraham to bless his descendents, and through them, the nations (Gen 15, 17). This means

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[60] This stands against Fishbane and others in respect to "mighty in power" in Nah 1. For Fishbane (1977: 280) "mighty in power" is a language of war, and for the majority of commentators, it refers to the severity of punishment.

[61] Accordingly, the Jewish Publication Society's *Tanakh* English version translates the phrase יִגְדַּל־נָא כֹּחַ אֲדֹנָי as "Let the LORD's *forbearance be great*" (Italics mine). As Levine suggests (1993: 366), כֹּחַ ("power") also connotes "restraint" or "the strength to restrain the use of destructive power." Levine explains, "This nuance is expressed in Nah 1:3: 'YHWH is long tempered and of great forbearance (*ugedo koah*).' On this basis, *yigdal-na koah YHWH* could mean 'let the forbearance of YHWH grow great!'" (See Chapter 5 for the parallel phrase in Nahum 1:3.)

[62] cf. Milgrom 1990: 109, who sees כֹּחַ as "the strength to hold back from destroying Israel."

[63] Levine (1993: 366) points out, "The logic of Moses' argument, here and in Ex 34:6-7, is that God's reputation as a compassionate divine being, as well as a powerful one, will suffer if Israel perishes."

even when Israel is faithless, the LORD will remain faithful to Israel. If the LORD were to destroy Israel "as one person," the LORD will be proven to be unfaithful to his own covenant promises. Thus, the covenant love חֶסֶד is invoked again in v.20 to move God to reconcile (סָלַח) Israel once again, even as he has done all along since the time of Egypt.

(3) God's sovereign power also is to be shown in divine sin/punishment-bearing (נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע). If the LORD were to be long-suffering with Israel and affirm covenant love to Israel who has fundamentally rejected the LORD and his covenant, the LORD also needs to exert his great strength in sin-bearing. As pointed out already (in Chapter 2), נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע means to bear iniquity and rebellion and its consequences, that is, to suffer punishment. By patiently suffering the wrong done, the LORD would defer, limit, or remove the punishment. In this context, the term כֹּחַ and the expression נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע together point to the LORD's sovereign power to bear sin and suffer punishment so as not to pay it all back on the sinner.[64] Without this, Israel would be "wiped out," "destroyed" (מָחָה), or "cut off" (כָּרַת).[65] With this, Israel would receive the covenant love (חֶסֶד) of God.

(4) Finally, the LORD's sovereign power is to be displayed in the LORD's holding sinners accountable for their sin (וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה) and "visiting the iniquity" upon them (פֹּקֵד עֲוֹן אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים עַל־שִׁלֵּשִׁים וְעַל־רִבֵּעִים).[66] The people's sin is exceedingly great and begs a divine just response. The LORD thus far has borne the brunt of Israel's sin and punishment, but now is the time for "visiting the iniquity." The כֹּחַ here stresses that the LORD would indeed severely punish those that are persistent in their defiance and contempt. The LORD's powerful "visiting the iniquity" would result in the Israelites bearing the brunt of their own iniquity, rebellion, and punishment

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[64] Ashley (1993: 257) also understands it as connoting the strength to be merciful and forgiving to the wicked.
[65] Sakenfeld 1975: 327. See below discussion on the term and its theological importance in relation to סָלַח.
[66] Levine (1993: 366) suggests the translation "he reserves the punishment" for the expression פֹּקֵד עַל, which would place the emphasis on the postponement of the punishment.

(נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפָשַׁע --v.34; cf. v.33). Since the LORD is also great in patience, covenant חֶסֶד, and sin/punishment-bearing, the covenant would be preserved and the manner and extent of punishment tempered by patience and mercy.[67]

In sum, the expression "make your power great" and the echoed terms of the formula function together to appeal comprehensively to God's sovereign power in patience, steadfast covenantal love, sin-bearing, and punishment. There is a logical and harmonious relationship between the divine attributes: The LORD's patient sin-bearing will allow the LORD to preserve his covenant relationship with Israel within which the LORD will severely yet mercifully punish and discipline his people. Thus, the entire formula can be seen as "a plea to God's mercy" in God's just dealing with his people.[68] Such dealings with Israel will result in the international recognition of the greatness of the divine character. The nations will come to know not only the LORD's power to defeat the foe (such as Egypt), but also the LORD's power to forgive the foe (such as Israel).

Thus far, Moses' usage of the formula is shown to be compatible with the formula's meaning and function in its context. More specifically, it is shown that Moses is not ignoring "the negative side" of the formula as Brueggemann claims. Rather, Moses emphasizes equally divine patience, steadfast covenant love, sin-bearing, and jealousy. As it was shown in Chapter 2, these characteristics of God are not only compatible with one another, but also function in unity and harmony with one another. The question now is whether this point can be affirmed in the LORD's response to Moses' intercession. Brueggemann thinks not. Yet the following analysis of the LORD's response will show that divine attributes in fact function in unity and harmony, while emphasizing one attribute

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[67] This sense is conveyed by what Rashi on Num 14:18 says in regard to God's being "slow to anger," namely, that God exacts punishment "little by little" as opposed to "all at once" (v.15).

[68] The rabbinic interpretation is helpful in this regard. As Milgrom (1990: 393) says, "[T]he rabbis believed that the entire formula—even its conclusion of vertical retribution—is a plea to God's mercy. Note this example: 'R. Judah said: A covenant has been made with the thirteen attributes (Ex 34:6-7) that they [Israel] will not be turned away empty-handed [when they recite them], as it says, 'Behold I make a covenant' (Ex 34:10)' (RH 17b)."

over another at certain times. God does vary his response not because he is unstable but because different situations call for different responses. Thus God adjusts his response sometimes emphasizing his patience other times his wrath, both of which are expressions of his goodness (Ex 33:19).

4.2. In the LORD's Response: The Function of the Echoed Terms and the Compatibility of Divine Mercy and Justice

The question now is how does the LORD respond to Moses? Will the LORD indeed make his power great in terms of patience, love, sin-bearing, and retribution? Will the LORD show all the attributes Moses calls upon, particularly to the older generation? For the answers to these questions, I turn to 14:20ff.

In response to Moses' request for "forgiveness" (סְלַח־נָא and נָשָׂאתָה, 14:19), the LORD does forgive (סָלַחְתִּי; v.20). Yet as Brueggemann correctly observes, the LORD adds an important "nevertheless" (וְאוּלָם; v.21) and pronounces severe punishment in v.22-37. God declares his intention to make the Israelites gradually pay for their own sins. God pronounces an extended period of punishment. God sentences those twenty years old and above to wander for forty years in the wilderness, a punishment that will not be completed until the older generation perishes in the wilderness (v.21ff).[69] Not only will the older generation die in the desert, but their children will also suffer for forty years due to their parents' faithlessness and rebellion.

Such a juxtaposition of divine forgiveness (סָלַח) in v.20 and divine punishment in v.21ff begs an explanation. The question is: How can God forgive the people and then punish them severely at the same time? Is this, as Brueggemann suggests, a theological contradiction in the text and in the character of the LORD? After reaching the "nevertheless" in v.21, one wonders whether God has really forgiven or taken back his

[69] Sturdy (1976: 105) says that "forty years" is often used as a round number to indicate a fairly long period (the average period of human life), and is used here as the time needed for one generation of men to die off. Whatever the term "forty years" exactly signifies, within this period of time, the older generation will die off for their repeated rebellion against the LORD.

forgiveness. God's forgiveness (סְלַח) appears to be "meaningless because punishment is announced almost in the same breath."[70] As Brueggemann says, it appears that the LORD's steadfast love is shown to Israel up to v.21, but after that "Yahweh's righteous will parts company from Yahweh's steadfast love" (307). In v.21ff God only appears to mete out punishment, and God's patience, steadfast covenant love, and sin-bearing seem to have no power or function whatsoever. Brueggemann states, "There is no spillover of graciousness outside of [the] embrace of Yahweh's righteous will" (307).

Thus, punishment and forgiveness appear to be "seemingly irreconcilable options" (271). Indeed, Brueggemann's interpretation shows that he regards them as actually (not just seemingly) irreconcilable options, saying that where the LORD's act of punishment begins is where the LORD's patient fidelity ends.

However, a closer reading of the text does not support Brueggemann's view that forgiveness and punishment are contradictory or that God's forgiveness סְלַח is meaningless from v.21 onwards. Rather, all of the divine attributes quoted by Moses do have a significant function in v.21ff. I agree with Brueggemann that both merciful forgiveness and punishing jealousy are clearly and inescapably present in the text. Numbers 14 lays more or less equal emphasis on the two theological themes of God's power to forgive (clearly the primary point in Exodus) and his power to punish Israel, even after forgiveness has been granted.[71] Therefore one cannot resolve the apparent theological contraction simply by subordinating one of the two themes to the other or by silencing one theme by the other.

The resolution to the apparent theological contradiction lies in the proper understanding of three interpretative issues: (1) the term סְלַח, (2) the function of the

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[70] Sakenfeld (1975: 317) recognises the possibility of such an interpretation and refutes it.

[71] If anything, greater emphasis is placed on the latter, surely in terms of the proportion of verses treating this theological theme of punishment. A stronger emphasis on judgment is also felt by the fact that "compassionate and merciful" is left out in Numbers. This goes against Fishbane (1989: 347) that Num 14 lays a decidedly stronger emphasis on mercy over judgment.

contextual echo "glory" (כָּבוֹד, v.22), (3) and the subtle function of the echoed terms of divine patience, steadfast love, sin-bearing, and retribution in v.21ff. The third point will be explored in relation to the three parties the LORD addresses in the v.21ff.

4.2.1. In the Meaning of סָלַח

An important aspect of the resolution of the seeming contradiction lies in a contextual interpretation of the term סָלַח, which is translated "to forgive" (14:19,20).[72] As Baruch A. Levine rightly points out, "The verb *salah* is always said of God, who retains the exclusive prerogative of forgiveness for offences against him, just as humans retain that prerogative for offences against one another."[73] Several commentators have offered a plausible interpretation of the term סָלַח that is supported by the context and that does not involve any contradiction between forgiveness and punishment.

For example, Timothy Ashley offers a helpful interpretation of the term סָלַח: "By forgiveness neither Moses (v.19) nor Yahweh (v.20) means to indicate that Israel's punishment will be avoided or cancelled, but only that the fundamental covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel will be maintained from Yahweh's side."[74] In addition, Milgrom suggests, "The problem can be resolved if the verb *salah* is understood as denoting reconciliation, not pardon."[75] Similarly, Sakenfeld observes in a helpful article on the "Problem of Divine Forgiveness in Numbers 14":

> It is essential to recognise that the real content of God's forgiveness here [in Num 14:20] is in the non-destruction of the people, in the very continuation of his relationship to the community as his community, in the decision not to create a new nation of Moses or of anyone else and not to disinherit the presently constituted community of God.[76]

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[72] Levine (1993: 367) points out that although the term סָלַח is "functionally translated 'to forgive,' [it] probably means 'to wash, sprinkle,' as we know from its cognates in Ugaritic and Akkadian... The notion of cleansing is extended to connote God's forgiveness."

[73] Levine (1993: 367) points out that סָלַח is used for offences that "cannot be ritually expiated," that only can be "washed" or forgiven by God.

[74] Ashley 1993: 259.

[75] Milgrom (1990: 112) rightly says that "the revelation of God's attributes in the original passage (Ex 34:6-7)" does not result in pardon, "yet the covenant is renewed (Ex 34:10)."

[76] Sakenfeld 1975: 326.

The interpretation of סָלַח as denoting reconciliation and preservation of the covenant rather than pardon and cancellation of punishment is worth exploring in more detail. Here, I will follow Sakenfeld's detailed discussion. Sakenfeld notes that the verb סָלַח may be translated in various ways, depending on the context.[77] Most importantly, Sakenfeld notes that the verb סָלַח "regularly has to do with the preservation of the fundamental covenant relationship, rather than simply with eliminating some particular act of punishment (e.g., Jer 5:1,7; 31:34; 50:20)."[78] Accordingly, Sakenfeld states, "In Dt 29:19 Israel is warned that God will cut off, not forgive (*slh*) an individual who worships other gods."[79] Deuteronomy 29:19 offers a clear example in which "cutting off" (וּמָחָה, cf. Ex 32:32) from covenant relationship is the opposite of סָלַח.[80] Accordingly, סָלַח in a context like Num 14 is best interpreted as God's free act of maintaining his covenant relationship with Israel in view of Israel's covenant breaking. As long as such a sense is kept in mind, it could be translated as "forgive."

Sakenfeld's observations are helpful in comparing and contrasting Moses' use of סָלַח in Ex 34:9 and in Num 14:19 in their respective context. In each case, the request for סָלַח is made immediately following the theological generalisation about divine character given in the formula or its quotation. In each case, Moses' request for סָלַח is made with an appeal to divine covenant love חֶסֶד. In the case of Ex 34, God's response is covenant-renewal or covenant-preservation: "I am making a covenant" (34:10). In the case of Num 14, God grants סָלַח, preserving Israel, and the conquest of the land is assured although in the next generation.

The narrative context thus points to the fact that the preservation of God's covenant relationship with his people is the real content of סָלַח requested by Moses and granted by

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[77] See Sakenfeld (1975: 327) for other usages and translations of the term סָלַח in other contexts.
[78] Sakenfeld 1975: 327.
[79] Sakenfeld 1975: 327.
[80] Sakenfeld 1975: 327. In Ex 32:32, a contrast is made between the LORD's sin/punishment-bearing/removing (חַטָּאתָם תִּשָּׂא) and Moses' being "cut off" or "blotted out" (מְחֵנִי) from "the book."

God in both Ex 34:9ff and Num 14:20ff. Yet there is a difference between the two texts. In Ex 32-34, סָלַח is granted after punishments and the withdrawal of the LORD's presence from Israel's camp (33:5ff.). After סָלַח is granted, only the demand for obedience and exclusive worship of the LORD is issued and a threat of destruction for idolatry implied (Ex 34:14); there is no more punishment. In Num 14, there is a reversal of the order; סָלַח appears first, and then the appropriate measure of punishment follows. This difference does not present a theological contradiction since the basic meaning of the term סָלַח is sustained in both texts. It may be that in Ex 34 the punishments meted out before סָלַח are sufficient so that there is no need for further punishment after סָלַח is granted.[81] In Num 14, if the LORD were to require all appropriate measures of punishment to be meted out before granting reconciliation, the LORD's presence would have to leave Israel's camp for forty long years. In Num 14, since God has already revealed his way of dealing with sin in Ex 34:6-7 and since Moses has made an appeal to it, God's response of סָלַח can be expected. God can be trusted to make his word good by granting סָלַח according to his merciful nature (although the timing and the nature of the punishment cannot be predicted).

So then, the fact of severe divine punishment following סָלַח in Num 14 is not a contradiction of divine nature or divine forgiveness. In fact, what can be asserted here is that the granting of divine סָלַח means divine retribution will be necessarily tempered by mercy.[82] This interpretation of סָלַח is consistent with the interpretation of נָשָׂא, which appears in the echo of Num 14:18 and in its context in 14:19. This term includes the idea of divine atonement without excluding the possibility of divine punishment. Accordingly, it is appropriate for God to hold the Israelites accountable and to punish them for their sin in a limited measure in the context of covenant relationship (either broken or maintained); there is no contradiction here. When the context is allowed to determine the meaning and

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[81] This is consistent with the statement given in Ex 32:34: "When the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." When the LORD grants סָלַח in Ex 34:9-28, the possibility of future punishment spoken in 32:34 is not necessarily or automatically repealed.

[82] Cf. Milgrom, 1990: 396.

nature of סָלַח apart from *a priori* assumption that סָלַח excludes punishment, the text allows for a more theologically coherent interpretation of the whole text. As seen in the diagram below, the content of סָלַח requested and granted is best seen not as a withdrawal of all punishment, but as preservation of the LORD's covenant life with Israel as a nation (note the chiasm). This is consistent with what is found in Ex 34.

Diagram of Num 14:13-45 and Its Interpretation:

Moses' Requests:

A. Moses requests the LORD not to destroy Israel all at once (v.15) but to make divine power great in terms of divine patience, steadfast covenant love, sin-bearing, and jealousy (v.18); this means Moses requests that the LORD punish his people only in a manner congruent with his strength in patience, covenant love, sin-bearing, and justice.
B. Moses requests that the LORD forgive/reconcile (סָלַח) according to the greatness of his covenantal love (v.19)

The LORD's response:

B' The LORD forgives/reconciles (סָלַח) Israel as a whole. Accordingly, total and immediate destruction is withheld, so that covenant relationship can continue with Israel as a whole. In this context, punishments are meted out to various groupings of the community according to their culpability.
A' (a) The older generation will eventually perish in wilderness and will not inherit the land, except for the righteous Caleb and Joshua (v.22-30, 32-35).
(b) The younger generation is preserved and receives the reconfirmation of the promise of the land but suffers on account of their parents' sin (v.31,33).
(c) The spies who gave evil report are destroyed in a plague, except (again) Caleb and Joshua (v.36-38).
(d) The older generation goes to war in presumption and gets defeated (v.40-45).

In conclusion, then, within God's סָלַח "there is still room for punishment, for carrying forward God's retribution in response to the community which 'despised' him."[83] One must steer clear from the "tendency to associate forgiveness of sin with deliverance from the human distress imposed by God."[84] This tendency may be largely a contemporary Western one—an intuition that is foreign to the Old Testament. God's grace in preserving sinful Israel "need not be precluded or even cheapened by punishment of the

[83] Sakenfeld 1975: 326.
[84] Sakenfeld 1975: 317.

community."[85] Rather, divine grace provides the context in which divine punishment is meted out for the purpose of making his people holy.

4.2.2. In the Glory of the LORD

Another key to the harmonious understanding of divine character and actions before and after "nevertheless" is found in the function of the term כָּבוֹד in 14:21.

It is noteworthy that the two oath statements immediately follow the strong adversative: "Nevertheless—as I live, and *all the earth is filled with the glory of the LORD*" (v.21), "As I live" (חַי־אָנִי) typically begins an oath formula (also in v.28)[86] which indicates that the pronouncement that follows is irrevocable.[87] This is the LORD's final verdict. What is unusual and striking is the second oath formula, which appeals to the "glory" of the LORD that fills all the earth.

The term כָּבוֹד can be seen as a contextual echo of the same term in Ex 33:18: "Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." As I discussed in Chapter 2, divine "glory" (כָּבוֹד) in Ex 33:18 refers to all of God's "goodness" (טוּב) which is revealed to Moses in audible terms in Ex 34:6-7. The connection between the term "glory" in Num 14:21 and Ex 33:18 yields the interpretation that the "glory" here refers to the revelation of his character (just as it does in 33:18).[88] As already mentioned, divine glory includes his righteous will to discipline his people (Israel and nations alike) by punishing sins. If the earth is to be filled with the glory of the LORD, the earth is bound to experience and know divine judgment as well as all the other aspects of divine glory or goodness.[89]

What is significant is the fact that the expression "the glory of the LORD fills all the earth" or very similar phrases occur four other times in the Old Testament in Ps 72:19,

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[85] Sakenfeld 1975: 327.

[86] For the LORD's oath taking by his own life, see Num 14:28; Deut 32:40; Isa 49:18; Ez 5:11; Zep 2:9. See Gen 22:16; Isa 45:23; 54:9; 62:8. For people taking an oath by the life of the LORD, see Ru 3:13; Judg 8:19; 1 Sam 14:39,45; 19:6; 25:26,34; 28:10; 2 Sam 15:21; Jer 4:2.

[87] Cf. Milgrom 1990: 110.

[88] See Gray 1927: 158. The "glory" as the LORD's "visible presence"; see Levine 1993: 367.

[89] For various interpretations of the oath statement, see Milgrom 1990: 112.

Isa 6:3, Isa 40:5, and Hab 2:14. Each of these passages reveals both divine salvation for the righteous and judgment for the unrighteous. Where the glory of the LORD is revealed, divine judgment and salvation are revealed. If the whole earth is filled with divine glory, then by necessity there will be both judgment and salvation.

The divine oath formula that appeals to divine glory conveys the LORD's concern and purpose for his fame and reputation in all the earth. This is the concern that Moses raised in Num 14:13-16 and in Ex 32:12 as a basis for his intercession. If the above analysis is correct, the fame of the LORD's name depends not only on divine salvation, but also on divine judgment. Since the revelation of the name יְהוָה includes not only divine mercy, but also divine judgment (according to Ex 34:6-7), we have additional reason for thinking that both mercy and judgment are involved in the context of the echo in Num 14. Even as the LORD's glory or goodness fills the earth, the LORD will act in accordance with who he is. In his freedom to be compassionate and gracious to those deserving destruction, the LORD chooses to affirm his covenant life with Israel. In the context of that mercy, the LORD decides to mete out the appropriate measure of punishment (which is severe in this case). Through the LORD's dealing with Israel, the rest of the world can come to know the powerful character and deeds—and thus glory—of the LORD.

The foregoing discussion is a response to Brueggemann's claim that the divine decision to punish arises exclusively out of the LORD's "self-regard." God's self-regard, presumably expressed in a concern for his international fame, allegedly excludes any kind of regard or concern for others, i.e. for Israel or humanity. According to Brueggemann, divine "self-regard" deactivates divine care for others. Such a view, of course, is related to his point that where punishment begins is where חֶסֶד stops. Yet I have begun to show that the "fame" of the divine name is inseparably connected to the redemption of Israel and the nations. In other words, whatever "self-regard" God might have is inseparably connected to "other-regard" or חֶסֶד. God's concern for his name, therefore, is not selfish but

self-giving.

I have begun to show the compatibility of divine forgiveness and punishment and the function of the echoed terms above. Now I will give a more detailed explanation of how the LORD's patience, love, and sin-bearing are affirmed even in punishment of the various groups of Israel: the older generation, the younger generation, and the faithless spies (following the textual order in Num 14). Each is punished, not according to God's arbitrary whim, but according to their degree of culpability.

4.2.3. In the Punishment of the Older Generation

In the LORD's judgment upon Israel, the LORD said that no one in the older generation who was counted in the census for the battle and refused to fight for the land (in addition to all the other sins listed above) would see the land (14:29).[90] As the older generation of Israel emphatically repudiated the LORD, the LORD repudiates them.[91] Thus, Brueggemann claims, "In this text [14:21ff] there is not an ounce of room for steadfast love outside of adherence to Yahweh's commanding authority" (307).

To be sure, the older generation does receive a rather severe punishment. The LORD emphatically declares that they will "bear their iniquity and punishment" (תִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־עֲוֹנֹתֵיכֶם) for forty years, "until the last of their carcasses is down in the wilderness" (14:33-34). In Ex 34:7 and Num 14:18, the LORD is said to be "bearing" the brunt of "human iniquity and punishment," but in the declaration of 14:34, this particular attribute seems irrelevant, ineffective, or inactive. In addition, the LORD seems to be determined to be present in Israel as a rather antagonistic, disagreeable, unpleasant God;

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[90] Milgrom (1990:113) identifies those who are exempt from God's oath of punishment, in addition to Joshua and Caleb. They are Moses, Aaron and the Levites. He points out the fact that the Levites were not counted in the census or represented among the scouts. Milgrom also lists Eleazar, Aaron's son and successor, who was "assuredly over twenty at the time of the census (cf. 3:32; 4:16) and yet is vouchsafed entrance into the land (e.g., Josh 24:33)." However, it is probably best to attribute Eleazar's safe passage to the fact that he is one of the many Levites who were exempt and/or that he belongs to Aaron who is exempt. That is, it is reasonable to assume that all the family members of Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua were exempt by the principle of collective solidarity in both blessings and curses.

[91] De Vries (1968: 54) says this of the entire people of Israel.

God says, "for forty years . . . you will know my frustration (וִידַעְתֶּם אֶת־תְּנוּאָתִי)" (14:34). As Milgrom points out (תְּנוּאָתִי) literally means "my frustration" or "the annulment of My intention."[92] The expression "my frustration" may refer to how the LORD frustrated the Israelites by thwarting their plan first to go back to Egypt and then to conquer the land and by ultimately letting them live in the wilderness for forty years. The LORD is annulling his earlier promises to this generation of Israel regarding the land. Thus, there really seems to be no evidence for divine mercy in the LORD's harsh punishment of the older generation. Yet the following considerations will show elements of divine mercy (patience, steadfast covenant love, sin-bearing) even in God's severe punishment.

(1) If, as Brueggemann claims, חֶסֶד were entirely absent from 14:21 or from the LORD's judgment of the older generation, then Israel or the entire older generation would have been immediately destroyed, "cut off" from the covenant. The mere fact that life continued for Israel and for the older generation demonstrates the LORD's great covenant love חֶסֶד. Even a rebellious Israel cannot cause the LORD to rescind his covenant. Thus, the LORD permits the older generation to live a normal life span.

Milgrom rightly says, "*hesed* stands for God's constancy, His fidelity to His covenant with Israel."[93] Covenant fidelity is not simply about maintaining a covenant relationship in some loose sense. Covenant fidelity involves *the specific terms of the covenant*. One of the covenant terms is that the LORD will hold the sinner responsible for sin committed (Ex 20:5; 34:7b). Therefore, in the context of an affirmed covenant relationship, not only is there room for punishment, but the LORD has the *obligation* (a painful one) to punish and discipline the rebellious. The compatibility of divine punishment and mercy in God's relationship to the older generation is found not only in the

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[92] Milgrom (1990: 115) points out, "The versions [*Targum Onkelos* and *Targum Jonathan*] recoil from such a bold statement and adopt euphemisms, 'you murmured against Me.'" Levine (1993: 370) calls attention to the fact that the *hiphil* of the root נוא (from which the feminine noun תְּנוּאָה Drives) "means 'to negate, deny, treat as nothing' (Num 32:7; Ps 141:3). This verb also occurs in legal contexts, connoting the annulment of vows (Num 30:6, 9, 12)." He then suggests the translation "the denial" for the term.

[93] Milgrom 1990: xxxvii.

fact that their life and covenant relationship with God is affirmed, but also in the fact that they are still largely held responsible for their sin.

(2) An additional support for the compatibility of divine punishment and mercy in God's relationship to the older generation in Num 14 is found in the divine attribute of sin-bearing (נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפָשַׁע, v.18).[94] That is, during the forty years of life in the wilderness that the LORD now requires of Israel, the LORD continues to bear the weight of Israel's sin and guilt. While the text in Num 14 does not spell this out, the fact that God continues to sustain the life of Israel, including the older generation for forty years, surely witnesses to such a reality. Without the LORD bearing in some sense Israel's sin, guilt, and punishment, Israel would need to bear all. The consequence of the latter would likely be a total and immediate destruction of Israel.[95] Consistent with his divine attributes, the LORD will in some sense bear Israel's iniquity and suffer its consequences (נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפָשַׁע) during the forty years of the older generation's extended life. In this sense, the forty years of punishment is also a time of divine self-giving in the form of sin-bearing. Divine retribution is thus tempered by divine mercy.

(3) The LORD's righteous dealing with Israel is also harmonious with divine patience (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם) in Num 14. The LORD's "long-suffering fidelity" does not end where divine punishment begins as Brueggemann suggests (307). Rather, the LORD's "long-suffering fidelity" in sin/punishment bearing is the very context within which the LORD metes out the terrible consequences of sin. The LORD is simultaneously long-suffering (in affirming the life of Israel and bearing its sin) and punishing (in letting the older generation perish in the wilderness). The LORD suffers long as he belabours, so to speak, under Israel's sin and guilt for forty long years. The LORD suffers long also *because* his people remains hostile and rebellious to God all throughout their life in the wilderness

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[94] For a general treatment of this theological theme of God suffering *because of* his people, see Fretheim 1984: 107-126. Fretheim also considers God's suffering under the motifs of God suffering with and for his people (see 127-148).

[95] Cf. perhaps the revolt of Korah and others narrated in Num 16.

as the narratives following Num 14 testify. Letting the older generations live out their natural span of life is an act of mercy which comes at a cost to God himself. Understood from this perspective, the divine decision regarding the reconciliation and punishment of the older generation reflects something of "Yahweh's generous solidarity," contrary to what Brueggemann suggests (271).

(4) There is another element that testifies to what Brueggemann calls "Yahweh's generous solidarity" even after the pronouncement of divine judgment and even during the forty years of life in the wilderness. First of all, after receiving the LORD's verdict, instead of humbling themselves, the older generation immediately acts in defiance and obduracy. They now try to conquer the land. They do this against the LORD's strong warning of their sure defeat and humiliation (Num 14:41; cf. Deut 1:42). What is significant is that the LORD's warning expresses the LORD's desire that they do not go to battle in presumption, that they do not experience humiliating defeat, and that they do not perish. Likewise, in Num 18:5, the LORD expresses his desire *not* to break out in anger and destroy Israel, thus providing a way to prevent his wrath from falling on the Israelites again.[96] It stands to reason that the LORD gave the warning because the LORD did not want his people to perish prematurely.[97] Thus even during the forty years of wilderness wandering, the LORD's earnest desire for Israel is life, not death. The fact that the LORD continued to provide faithfully for all the Israelites, old and young alike, during their life in the wilderness amply testifies to this (Deut 8).

(5) There is yet another evidence for the compatibility and harmony between divine mercy and retribution. It is in the content and nature of punishment. This will further deflate Brueggemann's charge that the older generation receives nothing of divine חֶסֶד or generous graciousness (307). The content of the punishment of the older generation or the consequence of "bearing [their own] iniquity" is their exclusion from the promised land.

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[96] This is done in the context of just having destroyed Korah and his family for his rebellion (Num 16).
[97] This is in continuity with the LORD's expressed desire not to have to destroy Israel found in Ex 33:3ff.

The mercy in the punishment is found in the fact that they are allowed to live their normal life span—"forty years" which is the time that is required for the older generation, twenty years old and up, to die. In this sense, in Num 14 the LORD's punishment of Israel takes the ironic form of letting Israel reap the fruit of their sinful words. The Israelites wished they had died in the wilderness. In mercy, the LORD spares them immediate destruction, and in justice tempered by mercy God lets them gradually pass away in the wilderness. This is divine mercy, even in the context of severe punishment.

(6) At this point, it is worth reiterating the fact that the older generation does receive severe punishment. As De Vries points out, the punishment in Num 14 stands out because the "element of divine punishment is not prominent in the murmuring stories."[98] The punishment in Num 14 stands out also in contrast to Ex 32-34 where after the covenant renewal in Ex 34 no further punishment is carried out. This prompts the question of what accounts for the increased severity of the divine punishment in Num 14. The answer is twofold: the gravity of the present sin and the accumulation of sins over a period of time. It is not a reflection of inner confusion or irreconcilable options within God.

In Exodus, Israel committed its first national idolatry—a single, one-time sin. In Num 14, Israel's sin is greater in that it involves emphatic repudiation of the LORD, of the LORD's promise, and of their inheritance. In addition, Num 14 is at the end of a period in which Israel's sins had "accumulated" for an extended period without full punishment. In Ex 32:34 the LORD said that "the time would come for punishment," and, in the narrative section of the Pentateuch, the punishment in Num 14 appears to be the first episode of comprehensive, corporate punishment that falls on Israel after the golden calf incident.[99] Such factors would show that in Num 14 Israel might well be getting punished for an accumulation of sins, including the golden calf incident itself—which was never really

[98] De Vries 1968: 54.

[99] In earlier chapters in Numbers we find the LORD's anger towards Israel being halted by intercession or perhaps deferred until later (e.g. 11:1ff).

fully punished (Ex 32:34). Further, the LORD's claim that Israel had tested him "these ten times" (Num 14:22) confirms that some sort of accumulation of sin is in view. Israel's rebellion and guilt have reached an extreme measure that calls for the eventual death at least of the adult generations. As such, the narrative context of Num 14 (especially from Num 11) is a demonstration of the LORD's patience with Israel. The LORD does not act or punish in sudden anger but defers punishment until an appropriate time.

Israel incurs punishment in Num 14, not because of the enduring nature of divine punishment (because with repentance and faithfulness, the LORD can be persuaded not to punish), nor because God's mercy parts company with judgment, but because the enduring nature of Israel's sin can no longer be tolerated. Yet even then, the punishment in Num 14 allows "the conquest of Canaan to proceed, albeit with some delay."[100] By extenuating the period of punishment, the LORD allows for the emergence of a new Israel who can conquer the promised land (see below).

The LORD's promise to mete out severe (although mitigated) punishment to the older generation in Num 14 is an important witness to the LORD's righteous will to hold his people accountable for their sin. In his commentary to Numbers, Levine points out that the expression וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה "emphasizes his punitive tendency . . . Its usage in biblical Hebrew parallels that of similar terms in Aramaic and Akkadian, all expressing the notion of 'cleansing' or clearing away guilt, debt, and obligation."[101] By punishing Israel or by making it bear its sin, guilt, and consequences, the LORD makes Israel in some sense atone for or clear away its own sin. The LORD will eventually punish those who continually rebel against and "test" the LORD. The LORD will not confirm his promises to those who are rebellious.[102] Yet, since this severe punishment meted out to the older generation occurs *within the context of reconciliation and reconfirmed covenant relationship with the LORD*,

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[100] Levine 1993: 381.

[101] Levine 1993: 366.

[102] See Gen 18:19 for the contingent nature of the divine fulfillment of his promise to Abraham upon the beneficiaries of the covenant.

this punishment remains as an example of how God's mercy and punishment are compatible. Thus, I have shown that the textual witness supports the harmonious nature of divine mercy and retribution/justice.

4.2.4. In the Punishment of the Younger Generation

I now turn to a consideration of the punishment of the younger generation. Although less severe, the punishment they receive is in some ways more difficult to reconcile with divine mercy. In the LORD's pronouncement of judgments, the LORD says that the children will enter and "know the land" (Num 14:31) but they will bear their parents' unfaithfulness or "fornication" (וְנָשְׂאוּ אֶת־זְנוּתֵיכֶם; v.33), that is, suffer the consequences of their parents' sin. The fact that the seemingly innocent younger generation suffers along with their parents raises the question of whether God is acting justly.

4.2.4.1. "The Whole" versus "Parts within the Whole"

Before I consider the issue of justice directly, I want to point out a feature that Num 14 shares with Ex 32-34. What stands out in both narratives is a contrast between the LORD's initial response to Israel's sin and the LORD's later response following Moses' intercession. The LORD *initially* indicts Israel as a single national entity, as a *whole*. The LORD's corporate indictment of Israel is related to Israel's collective understanding of its identity and relationship with God. It is helpful to recall Sarna's comment in this regard, which is quoted in Chapter 2:

> The Israelite conception of itself as a community bound to God by a covenant has dual implications. Society is collectively responsible for its actions, and the individual too is accountable for behavior that affects the life of the community.

Thus, Israel receives blessing (or חֶסֶד) in collective solidarity down to the thousandth generation, and similarly and in contrast, Israel receives curses also in collective solidarity but only down to the third and fourth generations (Ex 20:5-6).

In the case of Num 14 (just as in Ex 32), the collective solidarity of the Israelites implies that *all* have sinned and *all* are guilty. This is precisely the point the text itself emphasizes. The fact that *all the people of Israel* were involved in the rebellion (either directly or in collective solidarity) is stressed by the repeated use of the term כל "all": "the whole community" (כָּל־הָעֵדָה, 14:1a,2b), "all the Israelites" (כל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, v.2a), "all the assembled congregation of the Israelites" (כָּל־קְהַל עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, v.5b), "the whole Israelite assembly" (כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל, v.7a), "the whole assembly" (כָּל־הָעֵדָה, v.10a). By the repeated use of comprehensive designations for Israel, the text amply emphasizes that all the people were guilty of rebellion.

Thus, in Num 14:12 (as in Ex 32:10), the LORD is ready to destroy "it," and in v.15, Moses pleads with the LORD not to destroy "this people . . . as one person." But the question is what is the exact referent of "it" in v.12 or "this people" in v.15. The answer is not stated explicitly, but the answer can be inferred through the following considerations. The text seems to make a rather clear distinction between the righteous leaders, Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua, and the rebellious "whole Israelite assembly." The text does not make explicit whether the LORD is including Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua when the LORD threatens the destruction of "it" in v.12. Yet, since these leaders stand in opposition to the rebellious assembly of the Israelites (13:26-14:10), and since the LORD's glory appears to intervene for the righteous leaders who are about to be stoned by the angry mob of the Israelite assembly (14:10), it is reasonable to think that the LORD's reference to "it" in v.12 excludes Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua. Furthermore, the LORD's desire to make Moses into a greater nation than "it" does *not* require the elimination of Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua.[103] Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the referent of the pronoun "it" in v.12 and "this people as one person" in v.15 is the entire assembly of the Israelites, excluding Moses,

[103] In the case of Ex 32, it is reasonable to conclude that Joshua, who was waiting for Moses at the foothill of Mt Sinai (32:17), is excluded from the LORD's wrath. Moses being made into a great nation does not require the elimination of Joshua.

Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua, and by the reason of collective solidarity, their extended families.

Assuming that my analysis so far is correct, I can now draw a contrast between the LORD's initial threat to destroy the entire assembly of the Israelites who rebelled against the LORD and the LORD's secondary response following Moses' intercession. The general contrast drawn here is equally applicable to Ex 32 and Num 14. The LORD alters the course of action in response to Moses' intercession for the rebellious Israelites. In the LORD's initial threat, the LORD treats the whole rebellious assembly "as one person." However, in the LORD's *later* response, the LORD distinguishes between the *parts within the whole*, between those with greater guilt and those with less guilt (14:20ff). In Exodus, the varying levels of culpability and punishment are not as clearly seen. Yet, all the sons of Levites distinguish themselves by responding to Moses' call to rally around him and carry out the LORD's retribution (Ex. 32:26ff). As a result, *all* the Levites receive the LORD's blessing of priesthood (32:29), while others are punished in various ways. In Numbers, the different levels of guilt and punishment are much more clearly seen between the more culpable and the less culpable.

The ten scouts, who as "leaders of the Israelites" (13:3) "caused the whole community to grumble" against the LORD are put to death in a plague (14:36-37). The adult generation (who would have caused the children to rebel) will not see the land. However, the LORD will bring the children to the promised land although they will suffer for forty years along with their parents. The LORD's varied response to different groups seems to reflect recognition of the various degrees of sin and guilt of various groups within the whole. Thus those who are less responsible, but incur guilt by collective solidarity rather than by active rebellion (such as infants), receive a lesser degree of punishment.

4.2.4.2. Collective Retribution

At this point, I wish to raise the question of the extent to which "collective retribution" is at work in Num 14 and similar passages. It is true that commonly in the Old Testament, communal solidarity and corporate unity are taken for granted. In Ex 32-34, communal solidarity meant that even though some people (perhaps the Levites or the infants) may not have actively participated in idolatry, the sin of the majority of the people incurred guilt for the whole community. The sin of the majority affected even the righteous minority by virtue of solidarity. As Krašovec points out, underlying solidarity "implies . . . communal responsibility (collective liability) and corporate guilt" and therefore "collective divine retribution."[104]

It is helpful to explain this collective responsibility and retribution by means of the cultic conception of contamination or pollution.[105] The book of Numbers appears to presuppose such a conception at many points, including Num 14. If the whole community were polluted by the sin (despite some variation in culpability), the LORD would be justified to destroy the whole people of Israel. Thus, according to this view of sin and its effects, the LORD is not acting capriciously when he threatens to destroy Israel, but according to justice. It follows that when the LORD decides not to destroy the whole community, the LORD is showing his mercy to the whole. In addition, the punishment of different groups *in a mitigated way* according to different levels of culpability is clearly to be interpreted as divine mercy.

More specifically then, the idea of communal solidarity and responsibility and "collective liability" may explain to a large extent the suffering of the children in Num 14. Even those children (such as infants) who are innocent of any unfaithful attitudes or actions

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[104] Krašovec (1999: 111) says this in relation to a clan or a family, but the principle applies to a nation (Israel) as well.

[105] Milgrom's discussion of the contaminating effects of the sinner upon the sanctuary may be applied to the whole nation (1990: 444ff.).

toward the LORD incur guilt and punishment with their parents by virtue of communal or familial solidarity.

This is directly relevant to a contextual-theological interpretation of the echo in Numbers, because the concept of collective liability is a way of understanding the relevant clause: "He punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (v.18b; cf. Ex 34:7b). According to this theological generalisation the LORD typically deals with a family, a community, or a nation as one entity, even if the levels of culpability are distinguishable and distinguished within that context. The narrative context of Num 14 stands in a harmonious relationship with this attribute and further illuminates its meaning.

The familial and national levels of corporeality in Num 14 correspond to the suffering of the younger generation. First, in the context of their families, the children are bound to suffer to some extent when their parents and grandparents are punished. One could say that the children's suffering in the desert for forty years is a natural by-product of the parents being allowed to live their natural life in the wilderness. Secondly, the children's suffering is an inevitable aspect of corporate "sowing and reaping" built into collective identity and existence. The suffering of a part is an inevitable part of the suffering of the whole. When a nation gets chastised for its national sins, all people belonging to that nation suffer. In this sense, the collective liability or retribution is part of the natural process of collective "sowing and reaping."[106]

These points about familial and national corporate liability need to be qualified contextually. The specific forms of collective punishment are often situation-specific and person or group-specific. This allows for the differing levels of punishment within a nation. The varied punishment typically corresponds to varying degrees of culpability. It is, however, ultimately determined by the LORD's freedom to be compassionate and

[106] Krašovec 1999: 113.

gracious to sinners (see Ex 33:19). The LORD's decision will vary in different ways at different times according to his overall character, wisdom, timing, and purposes to redeem and restore all creation.

4.2.4.3. A New Generation Raised Up

There is another probable reason for the long duration of punishment that is implicit in the LORD's actions. The LORD in his wisdom and mercy is allowing enough time for the numeric increase of new Israelite children, even as the older generation gradually and naturally dies in the wilderness.[107] In addition, the new generations of Israelites will grow to the appropriate age and maturity for battle and conquest of the land. Furthermore, a slow and gradual death of the older generation prevents the younger generation from being made orphans in an instant, which would make their life unviable and the conquest of the land impossible. By allowing the parent generations to live their natural life in the wilderness, the children have the chance to grow into maturity. With the younger generations' physical and numerical growth and spiritual purity and maturity,[108] Israel will be able to conquer and inherit the land.[109]

In the larger canonical perspective, the book of Joshua is a telling testimony that the "new Israel" of the younger generations is different from the former Israel. The older generation perished in the wilderness and was purged out of Israel; the younger generation (and the children born to them) evidently learned to obey the LORD. Thus when it was their turn to take possession of the land under Joshua's leadership, they demonstrated faithfulness and obedience to the LORD. They did everything as the LORD commanded them. Their faithfulness indicates that the younger generation's harsh experience in the

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[107] However, the rest of the book of Numbers amply testifies that a good number of the older generation died unnatural deaths as a result of continuing to provoke the LORD's anger in the wilderness.

[108] See below for punishment as cleansing and discipline.

[109] Olson (1985) emphasizes that the structure and theology of the book of Numbers converge to offer a positive and hopeful perspective on the younger generation, on which the emphasis is placed from Num 26 onwards (see 118ff, where he outlines the book's structure). This stands in contrast to the negative portrayal of the older generation, treated in Num 1-25.

wilderness must have cured them of any severely rebellious tendencies ("stiff-neckedness") they might have learned from their parents. In this sense, divine punishment is disciplinary and is strongly positive. Krašovec rightly says, "The aim of punishment is to help develop their potential for faithfulness and service by providing a stronger motivation."[110] This last point is also applicable to the LORD's destruction of the ten spies, to which I now turn.

4.2.5. In the Destruction of the Ten Spies

To be sure, the LORD executes the ten spies who led Israel into decisive rebellion by וַיַּלִּינוּ עָלָיו אֶת־כָּל־הָעֵדָה, "causing the whole community to grumble against [the LORD]"[111] by spreading evil reports about the land.[112] This underlines the fact that sometimes the LORD will directly destroy sinners. This theme stands in parallel to Ex 32, where three thousand were killed by the Levites at the LORD's command and an untold number were also killed by the plague from the LORD. In Ex 32, those who are killed do not live to receive divine reconciliation with the rest of Israel. In Num 14, those spies who are killed do not live to see divine חֶסֶד or the reconciliation that is confirmed to Israel. They perish apart from (Ex 32) or within (Num 14) the reaffirmation of the LORD's covenant love חֶסֶד. Either way, God deals a fatal blow because God fully "visits" their sin on them. To them, the LORD does not extend his covenant love. Therefore it is, here, that Brueggemann may suggest, "Yahweh's righteous will parts company from Yahweh's steadfast love" (307). But is such a judgment warranted?

The statement "Yahweh's righteous will parts company from Yahweh's steadfast love" (307) may work at the level of the human experience of those who are destroyed, since they do not live to receive in any sense the LORD's covenantal faithfulness. Yet

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[110] Krašovec 1999: 223.

[111] Reading וַיַּלִּינוּ, "caused (the whole community) to grumble. The Septuagint follows the *Ketiv* spelling וַיְלֹנוּ, rendering "muttered against it (i.e. the land) to the community" (Milgrom 1990: 116).

[112] Yet even they were not executed on the spot, or on the same day they began to lead Israel astray. They were executed after the LORD reconciled Israel to himself and pronounced his judgment upon the whole of Israel. This shows God does not rise in sudden fury as sinful humans do.

human experience of destruction is not evidence that the sovereignty and solidarity (or judgment and mercy) of the LORD have separated into two irreconcilable options within the divine character (as Brueggemann suggests). The LORD does destroy some within Israel. It is not, however, because the LORD's steadfast love has parted company with the LORD's righteous will. Rather, it is precisely because the LORD's steadfast love for Israel (and for the nations) is united harmoniously with the LORD's righteous will that the LORD destroys some sinners within Israel (or some nations among the nations). Let me explain this further.

The LORD has a purpose of blessing all nations through Israel. If Israel itself is corrupt, it obviously cannot bless other nations. Therefore, Israel first must be purified. In Num 14, the relatively immediate removal of the spies helps to purify the whole community of the worst elements of unbelief and rebellion against God. Their removal prevents them from inciting Israel further into more rebellion. Such an execution also would inspire repentant hearts and proper awe and fear of God in Israel. This would help them to choose what is right in God's eyes thereafter. The concerns of punishing a criminal (by removal from the society) and deterring others from committing a similar crime are fundamental to even an imperfect human society with an imperfect and self-serving sense of justice, order, and peace. In his self-giving and righteous purpose to bless all the nations, God will purge sin and sinners out of his people Israel (and ultimately out of all creation). On the corporate level, God does maintain his steadfast love to thousands of generations of Israelites. Yet in the process of disciplining and purifying Israel, God will destroy some, especially those who are more responsible for sin (such as those who lead others into rebellion). Failure to establish justice in relation to sinners would actually constitute unfaithfulness to Israel and to creation at large. *Therefore, even the severest punishment of the LORD can be seen as inseparably and harmoniously united to the LORD's steadfast love, compassion, and mercy for both Israel and nations.*

The foregoing discussion brings me back to my first point. One may rightly speak of a phenomenological or experiential schism or contradiction within the human experience of divine mercy and judgment, since an individual may experience exclusively divine judgment (or exclusively mercy) at a given time. However, my point is that the phenomenological schism within human experience does not necessarily translate into an ontological schism within God's character. As I have argued above, even the severest of divine judgment can be understood as in some sense proceeding out of divine steadfast love. In the language found in Ex 33:19ff and Ex 34:6-7, even divine "jealousy" or its expression in punishment is part of divine goodness. Put differently, even divine punishment proceeds out of divine compassion and grace shown in freedom, which, generally speaking, affirms the life of a people who deserve death. Admittedly, the assertion that "jealousy" and its punitive acts are part of divine goodness is a difficult concept. It certainly is not a concept readily accessible to a dualistic mindset. Yet the text bears witness to the mysterious reality of God's goodness that includes "jealousy" and encourages the reader to look for ways of probing this mystery, which is what I try to do here.

4.2.6. In Divine Punishment as Discipline

Lastly, there is another important way to understand divine punishment in Num 14 that is compatible with divine mercy and that emphasizes divine goodness. It has to do with a pattern of divine action into which Num 14 appears to fit. That is, that *the LORD typically punishes his people to correct or to discipline them.* It is the LORD's way of teaching Israel (collectively) the righteous way in which they should go. The LORD had already shown to Abraham that Israel's continued loyalty to the LORD is a condition upon which the LORD will bless Israel and the nations through it (e.g. Gen 17:9ff; see the discussion of the Abrahamic covenant in Chapter 1, section 5). The LORD's discipline of the people of Israel as in Num 14 will help to purify rebellious Israel and make it into a

holy nation (see Ex 19:6). *Divine faithfulness to a sinful people necessarily means that God will bring a merciful and righteous measure of discipline in order that the people might be holy and fulfil their holy destiny.*

Other parts of the canon, especially Deuteronomy, pick up on this theme of Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness. In particular, Deuteronomy 2 and 8 give further evidence that God's retribution is harmonious and unified with divine mercy, for these passages see the forty years as a time not only of God's discipline but also of God's merciful provision:

> **Deut 2:7** The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has known your journey through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.

This passage asserts that during the forty years the LORD clearly cared for the entire nation of Israel. The LORD's continued faithfulness and compassion to Israel contrasts starkly with Israel's continued rebellion and distrust as witnessed by the chapters following Num 14.

Deuteronomy 8 provides further commentary on the forty years:

> **Deut 8:2-7** You will remember all the ways in which the LORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you to know what is in your heart, whether you will keep his commandments or not. [3]He humbled you, he let you hunger, and he let you eat manna, which you and your parents did not know, in order to cause you know that not by bread alone do humans live, but by all that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD do humans live. [4]Your clothes did not wear out on you and your feet did not swell these forty years. [5]Know then in your heart that as a person disciplines his child, so the LORD your God disciplines you. [6]Keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. [7]For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land.

In Moses' words here, the forty years of wandering are recalled very positively. The LORD maintained his familial or covenant love both in provision to and in discipline of Israel. It is important to note that both provision and discipline are divine ways of self-giving. Divine discipline by way of punishment is not for the benefit of the one disciplining (selfishness or self-regard) but for the one disciplined. Divine discipline is for the purpose

of teaching what is right and prodding people to humility, purity, and maturity. The people who take the LORD's discipline to heart are able to love, fear, and obey the LORD (even as Israel did under Joshua's leadership). The LORD's discipline through punishment, when taken rightly, produces righteousness in God's people.

Consideration of a quotation from Krašovec about the LORD's obligation to punish will help me to clarify my position further.

> This obligation [to punish] does not proceed from the divine nature, for the only purpose of creation is salvation, and punishment is therefore a painful burden to the fundamental divine purpose. . . . God is constrained, as a servant, to do something that contradicts the divine nature, being challenged by a people whose attitudes and intentions negate the very purpose of divine work.[113]

While I agree with the main thrust of Krašovec's comment, it needs to be qualified in some of its details. I agree that the LORD in some sense acts as a servant to Israel in bearing the burden of their ongoing sin and rebellion to affirm their covenant life with God during the forty years in the desert. However, I insist, against Krašovec, that the divine obligation to punish does not cause God to do something that "contradicts the divine nature." Rather the duty to punish *proceeds from the divine nature* of goodness (Ex 33:19; Ex 34:6-7). Divine goodness requires retribution and righteousness, and it thus metes out punishment in the face of sin. True, had not humankind been sinful, the LORD would not have the obligation to punish. Yet had not God been holy, powerful, just and righteous, God would not bother with the ominous task of judging humankind mercifully and justly to the end of redeeming and restoring them. In this sense, divine punishment flows out of his very nature that is holy and good. That said, God's basically merciful nature prefers not to punish unless necessary for the purpose of redemption and restoration.

Even as God implores through Ezekiel, God's fundamental intention for creation is life not death (18:23,32; 33:11):

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[113] Krašovec 1999: 491.

> **Eze 33:11** As I live, declares the lord LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in the turning of the wicked from their way and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?

The destruction of the wicked is not God's preferred way with sinners.[114] Even the LORD's warning against defeat and destruction in Num 14:41 and the LORD's expressed desire not to have to punish in Num 18:5 demonstrate divine suffering in punishing and divine reluctance to punish. Yet, while God's desire is not to have to punish, God will punish where and when it is necessary.

In view of human sin, divine punishment is a necessary component, fundamental to the divine purpose of redeeming and blessing all nations and all creation. Divine destruction of sin and sinners is part of what is involved in God's establishment of a kingdom of righteousness and of justice on earth. In sum, however painful it is to the LORD to punish, the LORD's good nature and his good purpose of redemption and restoration of basically sinful humans require divine punishment.

In Deuteronomy 2 and 8, then, there is evidence of a wider canonical theological testimony to the theological truths, themes, and patterns regarding divine mercy and judgment that we observed in Num 14 (and before that in Ex 34). This does not mean that the whole canon of the Old Testament is uniform in these matters, but the texts examined do point to a far wider degree of theological convergence than Brueggemann has conceded, both in terms of the coherence of individual passages such as Num 14 and in terms of their relationship with other passages, especially Num 14's relationship to Ex 34.

5. Concluding Remarks

Here, I want to summarize the main theological insights I have gained in this chapter. In keeping with that aim, I want to consider briefly how the theological findings in this chapter relate to the findings in Chapter 2. I will first consider how these findings

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[114] In Gen 6, too, the LORD expresses deep anguish and regret in having to destroy all living things along with, and because of, sinful humankind (Harland 1996: 83f).

are basically the same in both cases. Then, I will consider how Num 14, while not different on theological fundamentals, brings out new issues and emphases related to God's mercy and judgment. Before I turn to this comparison, I will offer a very brief review of Chapter 2 regarding the formula in Ex 34:6-7 and its context.

In Chapter 2, I have shown that Brueggemann imposes a false division between mercy and vengeance, or, alternatively, between solidarity and sovereignty, upon the formula and its context. In contrast to this approach, I have shown that all of the various divine attributes, while being distinct, together express God's goodness and God's sovereign freedom to be gracious and compassionate (Ex 33:19). Even God's intergenerational or collective punishment (Ex 34:7b) is compatible with, and in some sense governed by, God's merciful and patient character.

Now the question is whether that which held true in Ex 34 also holds true in Num 14. I argue that it does, despite some new points of emphasis in Num 14. In his comments on Num 14, Brueggemann demonstrates a similar deficient theological understanding of divine mercy and punishment as expressions of God's faithfulness (commitment to Israel) and of God's sovereignty (commitment to himself) respectively. God's commitment to God-self and commitment to Israel are one, unified divine commitment, namely, the promise which God swore to Abraham (Gen 15) and to the patriarchs and reaffirmed in Ex 34. As was the case in Ex 34, then, the background to understanding God's character is the understanding that God has made *one central commitment* to raise up a nation that will be a holy people to God (cf. Ex 19:5f) through whom the LORD will bless the nations and thus be glorified in all nations (cf. Gen 12:12f). To this end, the LORD deals appropriately with Israel. When the nation is lacking holiness, such as when it commits idolatry or rejects and rebels against the LORD, the LORD disciplines the nation. Although the LORD's discipline is severe, this is what is necessary in order to make a holy nation out of "stiff-necked" people. Thus, as testified in Ex 34 and

again in Num 14, the LORD's discipline does not fall outside of the overall "meta-context" of divine grace and compassion and covenant not only for Israel but also for all nations (and even for all living things: Gen 8:21; 9:12ff.).

In Abraham, the LORD made a decision to bless Israel and the nations through Israel, and the LORD will abide by that decision. To that end, the LORD commits himself to Israel to be both merciful and vengeful in sovereignty and freedom. Both mercy and vengeance constitute the sovereign and faithful LORD's righteous dealing with his people. Sovereignty is thus not exclusively or even primarily about judgment and vengeance. Sovereignty is more about the LORD's power to bless all nations through Israel despite human rebellion. That the human agents are rebellious means that God has the burden to punish and discipline them. Yet the LORD punishes in a manner that is gracious, compassionate, just, and purposeful. For God to cease to be gracious and compassionate would mean ceasing to be the God that God revealed himself to be in Ex 34:6-7.

Divine discipline or temperate judgment and punishment are integral parts of the goodness of God that blesses God's people for all nations. God's punishing righteousness therefore does not undercut or contradict God's mercy and forgiveness, but rather sustains them.[115] It sustains them because God's intention is for Israel and ultimately the nations to be a holy people standing in a righteous relationship with God. To this end, all of God's attributes will remain constant and united in all of God's dealings with God's people. The portrayal of God in these important portions of Exodus and Numbers (both of which record major crises in Israel's life with God) is not self-contradictory and dualistic, but united and self-consistent.

Besides these rather general considerations (that Num 14:18 more or less shares with Ex 34:6-7), there are at least three more specific contributions that this passage in

[115] Childs 1992: 373.

Num 14 makes to an understanding of divine mercy and judgment which were not emphasized in Exodus.

(1) In Num 14 divine power or sovereignty (כֹּחַ) is explicitly related to various aspects of God's merciful and just character (as depicted in the quoted portions of the formula). Moses calls upon the LORD to exercise God's sovereign power in patience, in love, in sin-bearing, and in punishment.

(2) In Num 14 the relationship between סָלַח and punishment is made clearer. The real content of סָלַח is the continuance of covenant life and reconciliation, rather than removal of punishment. סָלַח does not exclude the LORD's righteous will to hold the sinner accountable. Within his freedom to bear and remove human sin and affirm life is also his righteous will to "visit" the sin back upon the sinner and hold them accountable. The compatibility of divine punishment and mercy expressed in סָלַח is found in the fact that Israel's life is affirmed and its covenant relationship with the LORD maintained. That God chooses to bind himself in a covenant relationship with a rebellious nation expresses God's "*surprising* faithfulness."[116] Within divine חֶסֶד the covenant relationship, however, there is not only "room for punishment,"[117] but also a *requirement* for punishment and removal of sin and sinners to establish a righteous people of God (as revealed in Ex 34:6-7). Severe punishment is carried out to some within Israel precisely because of the righteous requirement of God's covenant relationship with Israel and with all creation. Punishment is meted out within the context of divine חֶסֶד and mercy. Put differently, it is because God is bound to Israel in חֶסֶד that the LORD punishes Israel to the end of disciplining it.

(3) Another theological contribution of the echo of Num 14 is to emphasize the varying degrees of sin and the varying degrees of punishment. Israel's sin is the rightful

[116] Sakenfeld 1975: 329.
[117] Sakenfeld 1975: 326.

theological framework for the proper understanding of divine jealousy and mercy.[118] The degree of severity of divine punishment upon various groups within Israel varies according to the culpability of each.

[118] Tunyogi (1962: 385) comments that the narratives about the sinfulness of Israel illustrate "not the divine justice, but . . . the divine grace." I suggest, rather, that at least in Num 14, both divine justice and grace are equally evident, although justice (as punishment) functions within the overall context of grace.

CHAPTER 4:

THE ECHOES IN

ISAIAH 53:4-12 and 54:7-10

53:4 אָכֵן חֳלָיֵנוּ הוּא נָשָׂא וּמַכְאֹבֵינוּ סְבָלָם
וַאֲנַחְנוּ חֲשַׁבְנֻהוּ נָגוּעַ מֻכֵּה אֱלֹהִים וּמְעֻנֶּה׃
5 וְהוּא מְחֹלָל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ מְדֻכָּא מֵעֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ
מוּסַר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ עָלָיו וּבַחֲבֻרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא־לָנוּ׃
6 כֻּלָּנוּ כַּצֹּאן תָּעִינוּ אִישׁ לְדַרְכּוֹ פָּנִינוּ
וַיהוָה הִפְגִּיעַ בּוֹ אֵת עֲוֹן כֻּלָּנוּ׃
7a נִגַּשׂ וְהוּא נַעֲנֶה
8cd נִגְזַר מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים מִפֶּשַׁע עַמִּי נֶגַע לָמוֹ׃
10 וַיהוָה חָפֵץ דַּכְּאוֹ הֶחֱלִי אִם־תָּשִׂים אָשָׁם נַפְשׁוֹ
יִרְאֶה זֶרַע יַאֲרִיךְ יָמִים וְחֵפֶץ יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ יִצְלָח׃
11 מֵעֲמַל נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה יִשְׂבָּע
בְּדַעְתּוֹ יַצְדִּיק צַדִּיק עַבְדִּי לָרַבִּים וַעֲוֹנֹתָם הוּא יִסְבֹּל׃
12 לָכֵן אֲחַלֶּק־לוֹ בָרַבִּים וְאֶת־עֲצוּמִים יְחַלֵּק שָׁלָל
תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱרָה לַמָּוֶת נַפְשׁוֹ וְאֶת־פֹּשְׁעִים נִמְנָה
וְהוּא חֵטְא־רַבִּים נָשָׂא וְלַפֹּשְׁעִים יַפְגִּיעַ׃

54:7 בְּרֶגַע קָטֹן עֲזַבְתִּיךְ וּבְרַחֲמִים גְּדֹלִים אֲקַבְּצֵךְ׃
8 בְּשֶׁצֶף קֶצֶף הִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי רֶגַע מִמֵּךְ
וּבְחֶסֶד עוֹלָם רִחַמְתִּיךְ אָמַר גֹּאֲלֵךְ יְהוָה׃
9 כִּי־מֵי נֹחַ זֹאת לִי
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי מֵעֲבֹר מֵי־נֹחַ עוֹד עַל־הָאָרֶץ
כֵּן נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי מִקְצֹף עָלַיִךְ וּמִגְּעָר־בָּךְ׃
10 כִּי הֶהָרִים יָמוּשׁוּ וְהַגְּבָעוֹת תִּמּוֹטֶנָה
וְחַסְדִּי מֵאִתֵּךְ לֹא־יָמוּשׁ וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי לֹא תָמוּט
אָמַר מְרַחֲמֵךְ יְהוָה׃

Translation of the relevant verses from Isaiah 53:4-12

53:4 He **bore**[1] our sicknesses and ***carried*** our pains.
And we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted.
5 He was pierced[2] for our **rebellions**; he was crushed for our **iniquities**.
The punishment for our peace was upon him; and by his wounds we are healed.
6 We all went astray like sheep; each to one's way—we have turned.
And ***the LORD laid on him*** the **iniquity** of us all.
7a He was oppressed, and he was humbled.
8cd He was cut off from the land of the living.
Because of the **rebellion** of my people,[3] he was stricken to death.[4]
10 The LORD purposed to crush him and to pierce him.[5]
If his life makes[6] ***a guilt offering***,
he will see offspring, and he will prolong days,
and the LORD's purpose will prosper in his hands.
11 Out of the suffering of his life, he will see the light[7] and be satisfied.
By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify the many,
and he will ***carry*** their **iniquities**.
12 Therefore I will apportion to him the many[8] and the strong[9] he will apportion as spoil,
because he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the **rebellious**;
for he **bore/forgave the sin** of the many, and he ***interceded*** for their **rebellions**.[10]

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[1] Words in regular boldface type represent quotations from Exodus 34:6-7 (although in this case, the quotations are repetitions of single words), while words in italics boldface type represent allusions.

[2] מְחֹלָל "pierced," supported by LXX (ἐτραυματίσθη), V (*vulneratus est*), and S (מתקטל). 1QIsa[a] has מחולל and 1QIsa[b] מחלל, but "On ne peut savoir si la graphie pleine de 1Q-a ou la graphie défective de 1Q-b impliquent des pronunciations de ce participle en pual ou en polal" (Barthélemy 1982 [vol. 2]: 396).

[3] עַמִּי "my people," supported by LXX λαοῦ μου, and also by 1QIsa[b], V, S, and Tg.
1QIsa[a] (עמו), "his people."

[4] MT לָמוֹ נֻגַּע ("punishment for him"; so Childs 2001: 417, "was there punishment for him."). Barthélemy (1982 [vol. 2]: 397-398) suggests לַמָּוֶת נֻגַּע "he was stricken to death" (after BHS), suggesting that the "taw" of למות was probably accidentally dropped. This reading is attested to by LXX, which reads ἤχθη εἰς θάνατον. Cf. Barré (2000: 4), who reads 3ms pual after 1QIsa[a] (נוגע למו).

[5] MT הֶחֱלִי "to make sick," from the root חלי rather than חלל (cf. 53a). Barré (2000: 5) points out that 1QIsa[a] reads a derivative of חלל (ויחללהו) and suggests חֹלֵלוֹ, the polel infinitive with the 3.m.s. suffix, to "coordinate with the infinitive דַּכְּאוֹ, which immediately precedes הֶחֱלִי.

[6] MT תָּשִׂים "if you make" (taking תָּשִׂים as 2ms, "you" being the LORD). Barthélemy (1982 [vol .2]: 403) suggests, "if she makes," with נַפְשׁוֹ as the subject of the verb, which is supported by 1QIsa[a]. "His life" is both the offerer and the offered.

[7] אור added, thus reading יראה אור , after 1QIsa[a-b], 4QIsa[d], LXX (Barthélemy 1982 [vol. 2]: 403).

[8] Motyer (1993: 442) suggests treating ב as *beth essentiae*.

[9] Motyer (1993: 442) suggests treating אֶת "as marking a direct object." His reason is that "'to apportion' usually governs a direct object in the Bible."

[10] פִּשְׁעִים "for the rebellious," supported by Th, Aq, Sym, V, S, and Tg, but "the LXX as well as all ancient Hebrew witnesses (1QIsa[a], 1QIsa[b], and 4QIsa[d]) read the abstract noun with the 3rd masc. pl. suffix," thus, פִּשְׁעֵיהֶם, "their transgressions" (Barré 2000: 5). Barré (2000: 5) suggests the text originally may have had פִּשְׁעָם, "their transgression," as suggested by BHS, the final *mem* of which "the scribal tradition understood as the 3rd masc. pl. ending."

Translation of Isaiah 54:7-10

54:7 For a moment I have left you,
but with great **compassion** I will gather you.
8 In brief[11] ***wrath*** I hid my face from you for a moment,
but with everlasting **covenant love** I will have **compassion** on you,
--says the LORD your redeemer.
9 For this is the waters[12] of Noah to me,
which I swore the waters of Noah will not again covering the earth.
So I swear[13] not to be ***angry*** with you or ***rebuke*** you.
10 For the mountains will depart and the hills be removed,
but my **covenant love** will not depart from you,
and the covenant of my peace will not be removed.
--says the LORD, who has **compassion** on you.

[11] שֶׁצֶף is a *hapax-logomenon*. LXX μικρῷ and V *momento*. JDW Watts (1987) suggests "overflowing," to avoid redundancy with רֶגַע.

[12] כִּי־מֵי, literally, "for waters of." LXX has ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕδατος τοῦ ἐπί "from the waters upon." Present translation reflects the proposal of *BHS* כמי (*RSV*, Whybray 1975: 186).

[13] "I swear" instead of "I have sworn" after Whybray 1975: 186.

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Chapter and Its Argument

Isaiah 53:4-12 and 54:7-10 contain several theologically significant intertextual echoes of Ex 34:6-7 and its context of Ex 32-34. The echoes in Isaiah may not have been intentional allusions to the formula of Ex 34:6-7 (see my definition of an "echo" in Chapter 1), but the theological parallels highlighted by these echoes are illuminating for a canonical, theological understanding of divine mercy, judgment, and atonement.

I will explore the theological function of the echoes of Ex 34:6-7 in Isa 53-54, raising my thesis question: Are divine mercy and judgment compatible? Do they function in unity in Isaiah as they did in Ex 34:6-7 (Chapter 2), or is there theological discontinuity between Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes in Isaiah? What contribution do the echoes in Isaiah make to the understanding of divine acts and character?

I will proceed in an order similar to that found in Chapters 2 and 3. In the remainder of the introduction (1.2), I will state the theological problems raised by Brueggemann's treatment of certain echoes in Isa 54. In section 2, I will explore the literary and theological background of my two echo-texts (Isa 53:4-12 and 54:7-10). In this section I will move from the larger units of context (the book as a whole) to progressively smaller units of context (Isa 40-66 and 52-54). In section 3, I will discuss the extent and nature of the echoes of Ex 34:6-7 found in Isa 53-54. I will show that these echoes are not quotations of Ex 34:6-7 but are repetitions of important constellations of theological terminologies and concepts.

In section 4, I will undertake an extensive theological exegesis of the echoes in Isa 53 and 54. In Chapter 3 (on Num 14:18) and Chapter 5 (on Nah 1:2-3), the theological exegesis of the echoed phrases will be integrated into discussions regarding the compatibility of divine mercy and judgment. An extended explanation of these echoes is unnecessary, because in Num 14 and Nah 1 the echoed phrases are direct quotations from

Ex 34:6-7. However, the echoed terms in Isa 53 are largely thematic echoes in which the characteristics of the LORD are applied to the Servant. Thus, the meaning and function of those thematic echoes in relation to the Servant must be unfolded before discussing the relationship between mercy and judgment in relation to the terms that are echoed in Isaiah.[14]

Finally, in section 5, I will conclude the chapter by giving a brief summary of the main arguments of the chapter.

1.2. The Problem Stated: Brueggemann on Isaiah 54:7-10

Brueggemann gives focused attention to two verses, 54:7 and 8, which contain what he calls God's "admission" of the abandonment of Israel and God's subsequent "comeback" (310-311).[15] Brueggemann raises several questions about these verses:

> Does Yahweh continue to honour covenant commitments to Israel and practice steadfast love toward Israel right through the exile? . . . *Or* is the reality of exile evidence that Yahweh has now, whether in legitimate indignation or in uncontrolled pique, terminated the covenant, only to move subsequently to renew it or make a new covenant? . . . Can Yahweh's self-regard result in the complete exhaustion of Yahweh's vows of solidarity?" (310; italics mine)

Although the "or' in this passage suggests two alternative theological descriptions of how one is to understand the LORD's action in the exile, Brueggemann manages to answer *all* of the above questions affirmatively—thus establishing mutually contradictory claims. Such an interpretative practice is part of what characterises Brueggemann's post-modern discussion of Ex 34:6f and its echoes.

Brueggemann's apparently contradictory answers to his own questions are consistent with his claims as regards the self-contradictory character of God in his discussion of Ex 34:6-7. Brueggemann's basic perspective on God's character inclines him

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[14] Since Brueggemann does not interact significantly with Isa 53 in his *Theology of the Old Testament*, other scholars will be my primary interlocutors in my discussion of divine mercy and judgment as they relate to Isa 53. However, my treatment of the echo of Ex 34:6 in Isa 54:7-10 will interact critically with Brueggemann's comments on Isa 54 as they pertain to the relationship between divine mercy and judgment.

[15] As in earlier chapters, the parenthetical citations in this subsection refer to Brueggemann's *Theology*.

to present contradictory and irreconcilable interpretations of biblical texts. In circular fashion, his dualistic interpretations of such texts then serve to support his remaking of the character of God as contradictory and irreconcilable. In what follows, I will contest his claims by looking at Brueggemann's two diametrically opposed interpretations of Isa 54:7-8.

Brueggemann's first interpretation of Isa 54:7-8 describes God's faithfulness as co-suffering with Israel. God's solidarity was never exhausted; it only took on a different form during Israel's exile. "Yahweh's covenantal engagement was deepened and intensified in pathos, through the reality of the exile" (299),[16] and this is the "reason for Yahweh's refusal to execute a termination" (299). Thus, the reason for Israel's survival "is not to be found in Israel" (299) but in God's persistent covenant commitment to Israel. In sum, there were both continuity and constancy in the LORD's covenantal commitment to Israel through the exile. His faithfulness toward and love for Israel were not exhausted even in what looked like abandonment. On the contrary, his love and faithfulness not only took on a form of co-suffering with Israel, but also intensified through co-suffering.

Brueggemann's second interpretation of Isa 54:7-8 offers a contradictory, opposite view. The LORD did in fact terminate the covenant. Yahweh's solidarity was completely exhausted due to "Yahweh's self-regard." Such self-regard "requires the abandonment of a partner who exploited Yahweh's fidelity too much for too long" (310). According to Brueggemann, the references to abandonment in v.7 and wrath in v.8 show radical discontinuity in God's covenantal commitment to Israel (310). God makes a kind of comeback after the abandonment, but this is no credit to God. Rather, it is by the strength of Israel that Israel is reconciled: "*Israel hoped beyond the hope or intention even of Yahweh, who had no such hope or intention for Israel.* That is, Israel's courage and shrillness, its defiance of its present circumstances, talked Yahweh into something Yahweh

[16] Brueggemann notes that the term passion refers to "strong feeling, the kind we have noticed in jealousy" (299). "But," he continues, "it also refers to a propensity to suffer" for and with Israel.

had not yet entertained or imagined or intended" (439; italics his).[17] Reconciliation therefore has nothing positive to say about God, except that God was willing to be convinced by Israel's better plan. The fact of abandonment, however, speaks profusely about God's self-regard.

According to Brueggemann's second interpretation, God's self-regard is what "sanctions harshness," such as the "massive act of destroying Jerusalem" (384) or the abandonment of Israel to harsh exile (311). This abandonment "is *not* harshness in the service of any rehabilitation. It is simply a departure from solidarity for the sake of self-regard" (italics mine) (311). God the wronged lover is committed to nothing other than self-regard (essentially self-honour) and thus "determines to humiliate, and finally to destroy, the erstwhile object of love" (384) until his "fury is spent" and "irrevocable damage has been done" (384). God's passion for Israel "is no casual, formal, or juridical commitment" (384), but "has within it the seeds of intolerance, culminating in violence." God "goes wholly overboard in passion, to Israel's great gain and then to Israel's greatest loss." God's passion is a "violent love, which 'always hurts the one it loves'" (384). In other words, God is hot-tempered and has no self-control, his acts of punishment (or "violent love") know no justice or righteousness, and his love is violent and destructive.

To summarize Brueggemann's two interpretations, then, Isa 54:7-8 witnesses to God as self-giving to Israel on the one hand and God as self-serving and unjust and violent toward Israel on the other. Isaiah 54:7-8 testifies to God's sustained fidelity toward Israel and also to God's ready abandonment in support of self-regard. Interpreted in the best possible light, these statements are consistent with Brueggemann's more moderate statement, namely that "Yahweh's sovereignty does not everywhere and always converge with fidelity, even though fidelity is finally powerfully affirmed" (311). But even this

[17] This particular remark is made in relation to Isa 55:12-13; Jer 31:10; Ezek 37:12-14. In relation to 54:7-8, Brueggemann says the text does not give the reason for Yahweh's comeback (311). But since Isa 55 is closely linked to 54, the reason for Yahweh's comeback that Brueggemann gives in relation to 55 may be applicable here.

statement is problematic, as Brueggemann himself indicates: *"this testimony places at the center of Israel's life a massive Holy Problem."* And that problem is none other than "the problematic character of Yahweh" (311). The question is whether Brueggemann's contradictory interpretation of God's character and acts is true to Isa 54:7-8 and its witness to the LORD.

As already noted in previous chapters, Brueggemann tends to move from the particular to the general, sometimes making sweeping claims based on a particular detail without consideration of other relevant issues. Thus, Brueggemann usually discusses judgment and reconciliation while virtually ignoring the issues of sin and atonement for sin—as if judgment and reconciliation can be discussed apart from sin and atonement![18] His discussion of God's judgment and reconciliation of Israel as seen in Isa 54:7-8 is no exception. He shows almost complete inattention to the larger narrative-theological context of the passage—except, of course, when the context serves his bipolar interpretation.

In my response to Brueggemann's interpretation of Isa 54:7-8, I will carry out a contextual theological exegesis of Isa 53:4-12 and 54:7-8, the two echo-texts. I will interpret the two texts keeping always in mind their indivisible literary and theological relationship (see subsections 3.2 and 3.4 below). Each passage provides the most immediate literary and theological context for the other, chapter 53 (the Fourth Servant Song) for chapter 54 and vice versa. In addition, I will interpret the two passages with due recognition that the book of Isaiah provides a proper literary and theological context for them. Furthermore, I will assume the methodological principle (see Chapter 1) that a proper recognition of the general features of the larger literary and theological context is crucial in a proper interpretation of a particular passage. Therefore, the general truths

[18] This inevitably involves an impoverished and distorted understanding of judgment and reconciliation and how each relates to each other. For example, Brueggemann tends to discuss reconciliation merely according to its surface meaning of a peaceful reuniting of God and Israel after estrangement, without significant probing as to the nature of the divine work of atonement that makes such reconciliation possible.

gleaned from the large contexts will influence and direct my interpretation of the particular passages in 53-54.[19] I now turn to a consideration of the literary and theological background of 53-54.

2. The Nature and Extent of the Echoes of Exodus 34:6-7 in Isaiah 53:5-12 and 54:7-10

The echoes treated in this chapter, especially the echoes identified in Isa 53, are somewhat different in nature than the echoes treated in my Chapters 3 and 5. First, the echo-terms and -texts addressed in this chapter are characterized more by the repetition of the *theological themes or patterns* of the formula and its context than by quotations from the formula and its context. That said, verbal correspondences are evident as well, allowing these echoes to qualify as "strong echoes" (see my definitions in Chapter 1). Secondly, the echoes in Isa 53 and 54 are diffuse, not found in a single verse (as in Num 14:18). The echoes in Isa 53 and 54 are spread out over a unit or pericope composed of several verses, sometimes with intervening verses that involve no obvious correspondences to Ex 32-34. Because of the dispersed and variegated nature of these echoes, one could refer to them as "echo-clusters"—collections of diverse terminological and thematic correspondences to the formula.

Isa 53:4-12 and 54:7-10 contain a number of theologically significant intertextual echoes of Ex 32-34 and especially of the formula in Ex 34:6-7. These echoes may not have been intentional allusions to Ex 32-34 (again, see Chapter 1), but the theological parallels highlighted by these echoes are illuminating for a theological understanding of divine mercy, judgment, and atonement. In the rest of this section, I will further define the nature and extent of each echo or echo-cluster, beginning with Isa 53 and then turning to Isa 54.

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[19] In this aspect of my method, I tend to move (unlike Brueggemann) from the general (analysis of literary structure and theological content of larger units) to the particular (the unit to be exegeted) rather than the particular to the general.

(1) Isaiah 53:4-12 uses several times the three standard terms for sin and punishment (עָוֹן, פֶּשַׁע, חַטָּאָה) that are used in Ex 34:6-7 (Isa 53:5-6,8,11,12). In addition, a word rarely used of God, נָשָׂא, which appears in Ex 34:7, occurs twice (53:4,12). Although the exact expression נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה found in Ex 34:7 does not appear in Isa 53, the constellation of expressions of sin-bearing expresses the idea of the phrase.

(2) In addition to the above strong echoes, there are a few terms that can be viewed as thematic echoes in Isa 53. The term "to bear" (סבל, v.4,11) corresponds to its synonym נָשָׂא. The term אָשָׁם in 53:10 encapsulates in one word the Servant's identity as one who bears and removes sin, and brings peace and healing. In that sense, the term אָשָׁם can be considered a thematic echo of the expression נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה in Ex 34:7. Likewise, the term פָּגַע ("to intervene," v.6) sums up the whole of the Servant's mission of sin-bearing and removing, and therefore can be considered another thematic echo of נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה.

It is noteworthy that the Servant's voluntary act of sin-bearing is inseparably related to the LORD's laying (הִפְגִּיעַ) of human sin on the Servant (v.6). This act of God placing sin on the Servant corresponds to the concept of the LORD "visiting" (פָּקַד) iniquity and punishment on his people in Ex 34:7. The vast difference between the two passages lies in the fact that the iniquity and punishment the LORD "visits" upon the Servant is not his own, but of others ("us all" and "the many"). In any case, the term "laid" (הִפְגִּיעַ) thematically corresponds to the term "visiting" (פָּקַד). The expressions "plagued, struck, and afflicted" (נָגוּעַ מֻכֶּה וּמְעֻנֶּה, v.4) and the terms "pierced" (מְחֹלָל, v.5) and "crushed" (מְדֻכָּא, v.5) describe the real effects of bearing the iniquity that is "laid" or "visited" upon the Servant. The Servant is held responsible and punished (מוּסַר, v.5) for sin that is "laid" (or "visited") upon him.

(3) Isaiah 54:7-12 uses various terms related to divine mercy, which constitute strong echoes of Ex 34:6-7. The term "compassion" (רַחוּם) appears three times (v.7,8,10), and "steadfast love" (חֶסֶד) appears twice (v.8,10).

(4) There are a few weak, contextual and thematic echoes related to divine mercy and judgment in Isa 54. The reference to covenant (בְּרִית, v.10) could be seen as a "contextual" echo of בְּרִית in Ex 34:10 and a thematic echo of covenant establishment and renewal in Ex 34 as a whole. The term "peace" (שָׁלוֹם, v.9) points to the LORD's reconciliation of sinners and constitutes a thematic echo of the LORD's reconciliation granted to rebellious Israel in Ex 34.

In addition, the terms "anger" (קֶצֶף, v.8,9) and "rebuke" (גָּעַר v.9) thematically and contextually correspond to similar terms and themes in Ex 32-34 (אַף, v.10; חֲרוֹן אַף, v.12). However, the deeply felt reality of God's past and present wrath and judgment in Isa 54 is only threatened or partly experienced in Ex 32-34.

3. The Literary and Theological Context and Background

I will briefly comment on different but related aspects of the literary and theological context of Isa 53-54, moving from the largest literary context to the smallest. First, I will comment on a few relevant theological themes from the larger context of the book of Isaiah, namely, the themes of sin, judgment, and reconciliation. Secondly, I will discuss the two texts' literary and theological relationship in the context of what has come to be known as Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40-60). In the context of Deutero-Isaiah, I will discuss the relationship between the Fourth Servant Song and other servant songs. Thirdly, I will offer a literary-structural analysis of Isa 52:1-54:17. Lastly, I will give a brief theological, thematic overview of Isa 52:1-54:17.

3.1. The Issues of Sin, Judgment, and Reconciliation in Isaiah

In this subsection, I will treat theological themes pertaining to Isaiah as a whole and as relevant to this thesis. In doing so, I will assume the literary and theological unity of the book, a conclusion for which scholars like Childs and Seitz have convincingly argued.[20]

The book of Isaiah richly displays God's judgment and salvation of Israel and the nations. Sin is portrayed as a universal condition that has thoroughly defiled all the nations of the earth, including Israel (6:5,9). The Holy One of Israel (1:4; 5:19; 31:1; 41:14; 43:14) will bring judgment and salvation to the ends of the earth. As in the days of the exodus, all contrary powers will be brought low and "the LORD alone will be exalted in that day (2:11,17)."[21]

Much of Isa 1-48 depicts divine execution of punishment on Israel and the nations. Divine judgment demonstrates that the LORD, who alone reigns in heaven and on earth, will establish righteousness and justice among all nations. The destruction of Jerusalem, the exile of the people of Israel/Judah, and the severe punishment of the nations serve that ultimate purpose. The LORD will punish and discipline Israel and the nations, but the LORD

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[20] Childs (1979: 325-333) makes a strong case for a literary theological unity of the book of Isaiah. He does so against the emphasis on discontinuity present in the work of those who argue for the book's dual authorship (fully developed by J.C. Döderlein and J.G. Eichhorn) or triple authorship (first posited by Duhm) (316-323). For example, Childs comments in relation to the theological shaping of First Isaiah, "Second Isaiah begins in ch. 1 with a theological summary of the message of the entire Isaianic corpus by using material from several periods of Isaiah's ministry" (331). In relation to the theological unity of the book of Isaiah, Childs states, "The schema of before and after, of prophecy and fulfilment, provides a major bracket which unites the witnesses. The proclamation of the forgiveness of God (40:1) is set against the background of his former anger (1.5ff; 3:1ff; 42:25; 57:16). The theme of Jerusalem as the forsaken city (1:7ff) is picked up in 62:4 and contrasted with the new city of joy. . . . The pattern of seeing the new heavens and earth as a fulfilment of an earlier promise is made explicit in 65:25 by the citation of 11:6,9. . . . From the canonical perspective Second Isaiah's message of God's final and decisive redemption of Israel is not qualitatively different from the prophecies of First Isaiah" (330). Seitz (1988: 105) rightly states, "The intention of the final form of the Book of Isaiah need not be unavailable to those who have first seen the text 'deconstructed' through historical analysis." Thus, he calls his approach to the book of Isaiah "Canonical Critical." Also see Seitz's 1996 article.

[21] Later, I will refer to this text as further support that the Servant must belong to the LORD's identity, since he is exalted with no hint of this being inappropriate. Isaiah 2 says that no one is to be exalted but the LORD, yet the Servant Song of Isa 52:13-53:12 states that the Servant will be exalted.

will not destroy either Israel or the nations (collectively).[22] But with a partial (though severe) punishment of sinners, the LORD's work of purging and delivering the world from sin remains incomplete. So long as sin rules Israel and the nations, divine judgment and wrath are called for. The fundamental problem of sin needs a resolution.

In Deutero-Isaiah, the work of atonement and redemption is attributed to the LORD's own "arm" (50:2; 51:5; 52:10; 53:1; 59:16). In particular, the atoning work of the LORD's arm is revealed through the Suffering Servant (53). As a result of the Suffering Servant's atoning work, the LORD will show everlasting compassion and love to Israel and to the nations. Thus, the glory of Zion will be restored, and Zion's "tent" will be stretched so wide as to encompass all nations (54). From the nations, people will come to Zion and be God's servants, and the world will be filled with the knowledge, glory, and worship of God (2:2-4; 11:9; 27:13; 40:5, 56:6-7; 66:19-21).

3.2. The Literary and Theological Context in Deutero-Isaiah

I now turn to a brief treatment of the literary and theological context of these two chapters, the long unit extending from 40 to 66.

(1) The proper subdivision of 40-66 is significant for my interpretation of the passages under consideration. Although Isa 40-66 is sometimes divided into 40-55 (Deutero-Isaiah) and 56-66 (Trito-Isaiah),[23] I adopt Seitz's four-part division as more accurately reflecting the subunits within the larger literary unit of 40-66: (I) 40-48; (II) 49:1-52:12; (III) 52:13-53:12; and (IV) 54-66. Seitz regards the four parts of the literary structure of 40-66 as sections that belong together, the third section (the Servant Song) being "transitional and not sharply independent."[24] Specifically, he accurately sees

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[22] In a sense, even the severest kind punishment is disciplinary—obviously not for those that are destroyed, but for the larger national and historical groups that may turn from sin in response to the judgment that falls on others. The LORD has the whole world and all generations in view, not merely particular individuals or nations.

[23] Muilenburg 1956, Knight 1965, Westermann 1969, and Spieckermann 2000.

[24] Seitz 2001 (*Isaiah 40-66*): 323.

54-66 as speaking of the "vindication of the Servant by God."[25] The connection between chapters 53 and 54 in particular will be important to my argument.

In Deutero-Isaiah, a pattern emerges and leads up to the Fourth Servant Song in Isa 52:12-53:12 (hereafter simply referred to as chapter 53 or the Servant Song). In chapters 40:1-52:12, there is much anticipation of a coming salvation, the passing away of the old age, and the dawning of a new day.[26] The Servant Song in Isa 52:13-53:12 effectively brings to a close an era of suffering and punishment.[27] Isaiah 54 marks the beginning of a new era of reconciliation and peace. The opening verses of Isa 40 proclaim that Israel's "hard service" is over, and chapters 54-60 depict this reality. Thus in 54, there is the celebration of a perennial covenant of peace (54:10) that is extended to all nations (55).[28] *Therefore, the placement of the Servant Song in this literary context points to the decisive work of the Servant in effecting the reconciliation between God and the people of Israel, as well as the dawning of a new era.*[29]

The Servant Song marks the end of one era, and Isa 54 (and 55) marks the beginning of another that is ushered in by the Suffering Servant. While the old era of suffering and hope in 40-53 and the new era of salvation in 54-66 form distinct literary units, the Servant Song in Isa 53 and the Zion Song in Isa 54 are theologically inseparable.[30] The Servant Song and the Zion Song can be regarded as "a theological climax"[31] for Isa 40-54 and as a theological springboard for the remainder of Isaiah. The shift between the two chapters is indicative of a momentous shift between the old order and

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[25] The quotation is the subtitle Seitz gives for the section consisting in Isa 54-66 (2001: 471).
[26] Seitz 1990: 243; Seitz 2001: 423ff.
[27] Seitz 2001 (*Isaiah 40-66*): 423ff. See Childs' able defence of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 as a unit (2001: 411).
[28] Westermann 1969: 275.
[29] Seitz 1990: 243; 2001 423ff; RE Watts 1997: 278; also, Oswalt 1998: 413. The suffering of 40-53 lacks "fruit" without 54, and the new world of 54-66 lacks theological grounding without 53.
[30] The thematic variation between the two subunits within 40-66 and the theological bridging role of these two chapters may explain the dilemma felt in determining the correct division of 40-66.
[31] Spieckermann (2000: 321) says this is true for Isa 40-55, which "theologically intensifies the relation of promising love and suffering" and which he sees as a prominent theme in Isa 40-55. Although I am not completely comfortable with Spieckermann's division of Isa 40-66 into 40-55 and 56-66, I do agree with his above stated point.

the new order established by the work of the Servant, but this shift is still part of the same overall storyline.[32] Thus, the "break" between Isa 53 and Isa 54 in no way precludes the theological value of interpreting the Servant's mission in light of its outcome and the nature of the outcome in light of its root in the Servant's mission. While the theological questions that are raised by 53 initially appear to be quite separate from the issues of 54 (and 55), they are inseparably related.[33] In my interpretation of the echo passages in Isaiah, I will assume the correctness of the foregoing interpretation of the relationship between the Servant Song and 54ff.

(2) The Servant Song of 52:13-53:12 has a significant relationship to the previous three servant songs.[34] Childs, in his commentary on Isaiah, offers an explanation of the relationship between the four servant songs that is helpful for my own contextual-theological reflections.[35] The view advocated by Childs is that the servant songs provide a theological "thread" that links the theology of Deutero-Isaiah together.

Childs sees a very close intertextual, mutually interpretative relationship between the four servant songs. Their relationship is marked by the following ordered pattern:[36]

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[32] Seitz 2001 (*Isaiah 40-66*): 471ff.

[33] As indicated above, I see both units as having significant literary and theological relation to the whole of Isaiah, and I will refer to relevant passages throughout Isaiah that support this. Following Duhm's suggestion, many have interpreted the Servant Song in isolation from its context, including 54. This is symptomatic of the larger tendency to read Isaiah in three parts. But (among others) Childs (2001) and Seitz (1988, 1996, and 2001) have shown literary and theological evidence for the continuity of the Second Isaiah with First Isaiah and of Second with Third Isaiah.

[34] Duhm first isolated the so-called "servant songs" as follows: 42:1-4; 49: 1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12 (Childs 1979: 322).

[35] Since Duhm isolated the "servant songs" in 1875, there has been a great deal of scholarship on these texts, not all of it equally helpful. One problem has been that the four "songs" have been studied apart from the text (Knight 1965: 12; cf. Childs 2001: 291). This phenomenon was a manifestation of how, after Hermann Gunkel, scholars tended to separate paragraphs into various *Gattungen* and therefore lose a sense of the unity of the book (Knight 1965: 11). Beginning in the 1950s, a significant change took place in scholarship, signalled by Muilenburg's 1956 work on Deutero-Isaiah (40-66). The unity and literary craftsmanship of the book of Isaiah was re-emphasized. See the survey of relevant scholarship provided by Wiley (Wiley 1997: 23ff). In my view this was a positive development with a view to theological interpretation (see my Chapter 1) and it informs my work. In particular, I applaud the work on Isaiah of Seitz and Childs who, along with scholars such as Oswalt (1998), have taken the emphasis on the literary and theological unity and the significance of the book of Isaiah to a higher level.

[36] Childs 2001: 412.

First, in 42:1ff, the introduction and call of the servant are given. Secondly, in 49:1ff, "the office of the servant"[37] is transferred "from the nation Israel to the individual prophetic figure of 49:3."[38] Thus "the mission of the servant in chapter 49 is a continuation of that originally given to the servant Israel: to be a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, and to release prisoners from darkness."[39] Thirdly, in 50:4ff, the servant's call is presented as involving torture and humiliation "by his oppressors, who are not from outside, but from within the nation of Israel itself."[40] Finally, in 52:13ff, the nation of Israel, after understanding the servant's role in salvation, now bears witness to the servant's exaltation after humiliation.[41] The universal work of the servant as a special individual[42] is a significant background to my exegesis below.

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[37] Childs 2001: 385.

[38] Childs 2001: 412. Also see Seitz 2001 (*Figured*): 172ff. In respect to the relationship between the first two servant songs, Childs (2001: 387) notes that "the citation of 42:6 in 49:8: 'I have . . . appointed you a covenant for the people' provides the crucial link with the 'first' servant song." Wilcox and Paton-Williams (1988: 83) points out, "Outside the Servant Songs Jacob/Israel is explicitly identified as the servant of Yahweh no less than seven times: at 41.8; 44.1,2,21 (twice); 45.4; 48.20. . . . Notice that all seven references occur in chs. 40-48."

[39] Childs 2001: 387. The nation Israel has a calling and a destiny to be a servant in relation to the other nations, but Israel "has missed its calling and failed to fulfil the function of its servanthood" (Oswalt 1998: 572; cf. Childs 2001: 385). It is in this light that Israel's bitter admission in Isa 26:18 should be understood: "We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth to people of the world." What the nation of Israel fails to do, the righteous Servant accomplishes. Thus, the Servant brings the salvation of God not only to Israel, but also to the nations.

Having said that, I recognise with Childs that in Deutero-Isaiah and even in chapter 53 there is clearly "a fluidity within the scope of the office of servant." Childs says that the Suffering Servant has not completely replaced the nation Israel, for "the servant in Second Isaiah remains inseparable from Israel" (2001: 385). The Servant is inseparable from Israel in that he is "a faithful embodiment of the nation Israel who has not performed its chosen role (48:1-2)" (2001: 385).

Based on what the Servant has done (justification of Israel and the nations through his vicarious suffering), Israel and the nations can share in "the office of servant." This means that while the language of the Servant Song best describes the Servant who "belongs to the identity of the unique God," it is in a limited way applicable to other servants of the LORD in Zion (54:17) who share in the suffering of the Servant.

[40] Childs 2001: 412.

[41] Childs 2001: 412.

[42] Muilenburg 1956, Hooker 1959 and 1995, Snaith 1967, among others, have suggested that the Suffering Servant is the corporate Israel. See also Rembaum (1982) on this interpretation as part of Jewish exegetical tradition. There are major problems with their view. First of all, throughout the whole of Isaiah, Israel is characterised as a people who are thoroughly sinful, who are incapable of submission to God. Not only is Israel marked by the social evil of injustice, but also, more importantly, Israel has persisted in idolatry. The Servant, on the contrary, is portrayed as an innocent and righteous individual who is submissive to God and is able to justify others. It is worth noting that from the perspective of Leviticus, the animal for a guilt offering

Related to the transfer of "the office of the servant"[43] from the nation Israel to an individual in 49 is the "shift of emphasis away from 'Israel' and to 'Zion.'"[44] The reference to Zion may appear to narrow the focus of God's salvation. However, when Zion is understood symbolically, this transfer actually *expands* the focus from the nation of Israel to the nations and thus implies a kind of universalism.[45] Such an expansion in focus points to the role that the salvation of Israel has in bringing salvation to the Gentiles. Whatever the precise interpretation or definition of Zion and its relation to Israel, it seems that the shift in terminology is related to a movement towards the reconstitution of the people of God so as to include the Gentile nations. The reconstitution of the people of God in 49ff is a result of the saving work of the Suffering Servant (Isa 52:10; 53:1).

3.3. Structural Analysis of Isaiah 52:1-54:17

The following chart represents the structural analysis that will be implicit in the remainder of the chapter.

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had to be blameless. Even the most righteous in Israel is found guilty in God's eyes ("all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" in Isa 63:6). If Israel is the Suffering Servant, it is difficult to imagine how such a sinful nation could have been a "guilt offering" (53:10) for the nations. Only a wholly righteous person or nation could have been the Suffering Servant, not Israel.

Secondly, the Servant Song makes a distinction between the Servant "he" and the announcers "we" for whom and for whose sins the Servant makes atonement. As Hugenberger has shown, the referent of "we" in 53 is Israel (Hugenberger 1995: 110; also see Childs 2001: 413; Westermann 1969: 257). Israel is the "we" who confess that the Servant suffered for their guilt (Westermann 1969: 257). Israel is the "we" to whom the "arm of the LORD" has been revealed; Israel is not the "arm of the LORD" revealed in and through the Servant. See Seitz (2001: 464) for the interpretation of "we" as the "servants" of the LORD who report what they have heard and seen of the arm of the LORD.

[43] Childs 2001: 385.

[44] Wilcox and Paton-Williams 1988: 84. Oswalt (1998: 415) makes the following helpful point: "It is probably not coincidental that while the term "Zion" occurs 8 times between 49:14 and 52:8, it does not occur again until 59:20. This suggests that the prophet is consciously resisting the limitation of the implications of God's forgiving grace that would result from the use of "Zion" here. To be sure, the imagery is that which has been previously applied to Zion. But the absence of that term here when it had been used frequently immediately before suggests that, because of the work of the Servant, all who feel barren and dejected and alone as a result of their sins now have reason to shout for joy. All, Gentiles and Jews alike, may become the blessed people of God."

[45] For examples of scholars who deny a universalistic message in Deutero-Isaiah, see Snaith and Orlinsky 1967.

A. The redemption of Zion (52:1-12)
B. The exaltation of the Servant (52:13)
C. The many nations witness the Servant's suffering and are "sprinkled" by him (52:14-15)
D. The arm of the LORD revealed in and through the Servant (53:1)
E. Suffering in the early days (53:2-3)
F. The Servant's vicarious suffering (53:4-6b)
D. The LORD laid our sin on the Servant (53:6c)
F. The Servant as the lamb to be slaughtered (53:7-8b)
E. Suffering unto death, although innocent (53:8c-9)
D. The LORD's will to crush him and the Servant's will to be the guilt offering (53:10a-b)
B. The vindication of the Servant (53:10c-11b)
C. The Servant will justify the many through his intercession (53:11c-12)
A. The glory of Zion (54:1-17)

3.4. A Thematic Overview of Isaiah 52:1-54:17

In the following thematic analysis of Isa 52:1-54:17, I will briefly present the thematic content of the text in a narrative form. The subsequent examination is reflected in the theological exegesis of the echoed terms in section 4 below.

The holy city Zion was reduced to ashes (52:2), but "the LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations" (52:10). The LORD has returned to Zion to redeem and comfort its people (52:9). Thus, the messenger exhorts Zion to rise up and put on the garments of strength and joy (52:1,8), announcing good news of peace and salvation (52:7). The people in captivity are called back to the holy city (52:11-12). Even as they were "sold for nothing," they are now redeemed "without money," for the LORD has accomplished both without the use of money (52:3). The LORD reduced Zion to ashes, for his name was despised due to his people's intoxication in sin. Now, however, the LORD has redeemed Zion, for his name was reviled also because his holy city lay in ruins (52:5). The LORD has redeemed Zion for his name's sake, so that his people will know his name, that he is the LORD (52:6).

The messenger announces the good news, what he has heard and seen (53:1). The messenger announces how the "arm of the LORD" has been revealed to those in Zion

(53:1).[46] The salvation of God is revealed most specifically through the Suffering Servant who has paid the price of redemption both for his people and for the nations (so that they are redeemed "without money"). From youth the Servant was despised and rejected, for he had no majesty or beauty, and his life was filled with suffering (53:2-3). The messenger bears witness that the Servant's life was characterized by suffering because he was bearing the iniquity, rebellion, and sin "for us all" and for "the many" (53:5,12). He took upon himself all people's infirmities and diseases and carried their sorrows and pain (v.4).

It was the LORD's will to crush the Servant and cause him to suffer for us (53:10). It was the LORD who laid on him the iniquity of us all (53:6). The Servant was stricken, smitten, afflicted, and oppressed by God for our sins (53:4).[47] It was also the Servant's will to offer his own life as "a guilt offering" (53:10) to intercede for the rebellious (53:12), for "all" have gone astray (53:6). As a guilt offering, the Servant was pierced, stricken, crushed (53:4-5), and disfigured (52:14). He was oppressed and afflicted (53:7), and by oppression and judgment he was taken away (53:8). He was executed and buried with the wicked although he was innocent (53:9). He poured out his life unto death, bearing both "our" sin and the sin of the "many." It is the Servant's suffering and death that brought "us" redemption and reconciliation, peace and healing (53:6).

After his suffering, the Servant will see the light and be satisfied (53:11). The LORD will exalt (i.e. raise up or lift up) the Servant to the highest place (52:13). The LORD's exaltation of the Servant will astonish the nations who were formerly astounded at the Servant's humiliation, disfigurement, and death (52:14). The Servant will "sprinkle" and justify many nations ("the many," 52:15). The LORD will prolong the exalted Servant's days and give him "a portion" or "offspring" among "the many" (53:10,12). The Servant's

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[46] The messenger uses the pronoun "we" apparently to speak for those who have witnessed the revelation of the "arm of the LORD." See Seitz 2001 (*Isaiah 40-66*): 465.

[47] On the one hand, 53:4 expresses the people's misunderstanding that the Servant was suffering for his own sins in God's hands. On the other hand, the verse affirms that the Servant was suffering, though voluntarily and vicariously, in the hands of God.

reward will be those whom the Servant will justify (53:11), i.e. the "servants" of the LORD (54:16; see below).

After delivering the announcement concerning the salvation of the LORD accomplished through the Suffering Servant (52:13-53:12), the messenger once again brings a message of comfort and hope to Zion (54:1-17). His message is full of promises: innumerable inhabitants (54:2), widened habitations ("tents") that are able to include the nations (54:3), reconciliation with God (54:4-7), great expressions of divine compassion (54:7,8,10), everlasting covenant love and peace (54:8,10), unmatched beauty and glory (54:11-13), and established security (54:14-17). This is the heritage of the "servants" of the LORD (54:16) whom the Servant justifies, and a fuller expansion of the "good news" of peace and salvation that were earlier announced to Zion (see 52:7).

4. A Contextual, Theological Exegesis of Isaiah 53:5-12 and 54:7-10

As noted in subsection 1.2 above, Brueggemann has offered two alternative interpretations of Isa 54:7-10, both of which are intended to demonstrate the allegedly disjunctive and problematic character of God. I would argue that when Israel's sin is fully recognised, the issue of God's abandonment or severe punishment of Israel (in the exile) is not as great a problem for the divine character as Brueggemann claims. This point will become evident in my interpretation of the two passages. The following theological exegesis of Isa 53:4-12 will reflect the theological, thematic analysis of Isa 52:13-54 given above.

In this section, I will first turn to a theological exegesis of the echoed terms in Isa 53:5-12 (subsection 4.1) and will later turn to the echoed terms in Isa 54 (subsection 4.2). I will treat the theological functions of the echoed terms and expressions roughly in the order they appear in the text (subsections 4.1.1-4.1.4). I will then turn to the issues of the

righteousness of the divine act described in the Servant Song and the compatibility of divine mercy and judgment (subsections 4.1.5-4.1.7).

In subsection 4.1.8, before I turn to Isa 54 I will offer an excursus. I will raise objections to H. M. Orlinsky's denial of the vicarious nature of the Servant's suffering. This discussion should serve to strengthen my overall argument regarding the nature of the Servant's work as vicarious in nature and as an extension of the LORD's atoning work as revealed in Ex 34:6-7.

4.1. A Contextual, Theological Exegesis of Isaiah 53:5-12: Divine Mercy and Judgment in the Suffering of the Servant

The compatibility and unity of divine mercy and judgment in the Servant Song are displayed in the following ways: The LORD resolves the problem of human sin and effects righteousness and salvation through the suffering of the Servant. The suffering of the Servant is characterized by vicarious sin-bearing and sin-removing. Through his vicarious sin-bearing, the Servant effects reconciliation between God and sinners. Thus, the Servant's work of sin-bearing stands in continuity with the LORD's own work of sin-bearing declared in Ex 34:6-7. Seen in the light of God's atoning work through the Servant, God's punishment of the Servant can be seen as an expression of God's mercy on sinners. God's justice (in requiring full payment for sin) and mercy (for sinners) are simultaneously and supremely expressed in the suffering work of the Servant.

4.1.1. The Echoed Terms of the Expression נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה

In Isa 53:4-12, the three standard terms for sin and punishment (עָוֹן, פֶּשַׁע and חֵטְא[48]) which appear in Ex 34:6-7 are used more than once: מְפְשָׁעֵנוּ , מֵעֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ in v.5; עֲוֹן in v.6; מִפְּשַׁע in v.8; עֲוֹנָתָם in v.11; פֹּשְׁעִים and חֵטְא in v.12. These terms of sin, guilt, and punishment are used in conjunction with the term נָשָׂא or its synonym סבל to depict the Servant as the sin-bearer: חֵטְא־רַבִּים נָשָׂא (v.4), וַעֲוֹנָתָם יִסְבֹּל (v.10). The

[48] חֲטָאָה in Ex 34:6-7.

terms of sin/guilt/punishment are also used with other terms to depict the terrible consequences the Servant suffers as a result of being a sin-bearer. Thus, the Servant is portrayed as "bearing our sicknesses" (חֳלָיֵנוּ נָשָׂא, v.4), "carrying our pains" (וּמַכְאֹבֵינוּ סְבָלָם, v.4), "plagued, struck down by God, and afflicted" (נָגוּעַ מֻכֵּה אֱלֹהִים וּמְעֻנֶּה, v.4), "pierced for our rebellions" (מְחֹלָל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ, v.5), and "crushed for our iniquities" (מְדֻכָּא מֵעֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ, v.5). Thus although the exact expression נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה as found in Ex 34:7 does not appear in Isa 53, the graphic depiction of it in relation to the Servant is strongly present.

As pointed out in Chapter 2, נָשָׂא עָוֹן may mean both "bear sin and punishment" and "remove or forgive sin."[49] As I suggested earlier (in Chapter 2), there is a theological means-end relationship between these two legitimate interpretations. In Ex 34, the LORD reconciled Israel to himself by means of the LORD's bearing of Israel's offence. In the Servant Song, the Servant is the one who bears the sin and punishment, makes intercession for the transgressors (v.12), and brings reconciliation ("peace" and "healing," v.5). The Servant bears (נָשָׂא) human sins and suffers their punishment, even as the LORD carries human sin and responsibility in Ex 34:6-7. What is striking here in the Servant Song is that it is the LORD who lays upon the Servant the iniquity, rebellion, and sin of the world and who makes the Servant bear what the LORD otherwise bears. In this way, the Servant Song describes the Servant as doing what elsewhere is seen as something the LORD alone can do: namely, to bear and remove sin. This interpretation supports the idea that that the Servant "belongs to the identity of the unique God."[50] Accordingly, the various terms and expressions in relation to the Servant's sin-bearing function indicate that the Servant's suffering is an extension of the LORD's own suffering revealed in the expression "bearing iniquity, rebellion, and sin" in Ex 34:7a and echoed in Num 14:18.

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[49] Minn (1966: 22) acknowledges that "in the Heb *awon* the notions of guilt and punishment merge." JDW Watts (1987: 232) renders this phrase, "He forgives their wrongs."

[50] Bauckham 1998: 51.

The benefits of the Servant's suffering are healing and peace. The text declares, "the punishment for our peace was upon him; and by his wounds we are healed" (מוּסַר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ עָלָיו וּבַחֲבֻרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא־לָנוּ, v.5). Claus Westermann rightly states, "The healing gained for the others (v.5) by his stripes includes as well the forgiveness of their sins and the removal of their punishment."[51] In other words, healing includes reconciliation with God. This is in fact what is stated in 53:11: "my righteous servant will justify the many." If the Servant's suffering brings reconciliation to sinners, then it is implicit that the Servant's sin-bearing is vicarious, just as is the LORD's suffering in Ex 32-34. In this vein, George A. Knight makes the helpful comment that the LORD, as Israel's husband, becomes

> the Suffering Servant that Israel was elected to be, for Israel could not fulfil her calling alone (43:22ff.). . . . In his capacity as the Suffering Servant himself and by means of his union with his wife Israel, God subsumed her justified and penal suffering into his own vicarious bearing of the *rebelliousness* and *iniquities* (v.5) of *the masses* (v.14)[52] (italics mine).

The נָשָׂא עָוֹן of the LORD in Ex 34:6 and in Num 14:18 and of the Servant in Isa 53 is vicarious in the specific sense that *the LORD or the Servant bears that consequence or that punishment of sin that Israel or the world cannot bear without being utterly destroyed.* The נָשָׂא עָוֹן either of the LORD or of the Servant is vicarious *not* because the LORD or the Servant removes the consequence of sins, acquits the guilty, or lets the sinner go scot-free.[53] Rather, it is vicarious because the LORD or the Servant substitutes himself as the bearer of the human sin/guilt/punishment *in order that humans might have a continued life with the LORD.*[54] In the face of a lack of a means of atonement for rebellion against the

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[51] Westermann 1969: 263.

[52] Knight 1965: 234-235.

[53] This is how both Orlinsky (1967: 59) and Whybray (1978:66) would define vicariousness

[54] Whybray 1978: 51. At this point, Whybray would reject the interpretation that the idiom נָשָׂא עָוֹן expresses the concept of the LORD bearing the punishment of his people. In his effort to deny that there is any evidence for vicariousness in the entire Old Testament, he dismisses the interpretation that נָשָׂא עָוֹן in Ezek 4:48 "symbolizes the suffering of God as much as it symbolizes the future suffering of the people." Accordingly, in the seven cases (Ex 34:7; Num 14:18; Pss 32:5; 85:3; Isa 33:24; Hos 14:3; Mic 7:18) in which he identifies the LORD as the subject of the verb נָשָׂא, he translates the expression as "he 'takes away' human sin, that is, he forgives the sinner"(p.32). If Whybray did not have *a priori* conception that there is no

LORD, the LORD makes atonement through the sin-bearing of the Servant, a sin-bearing which is in some sense the LORD's own work. The LORD does so because ultimately only the LORD (or, specifically, the Servant who "belongs to the identity of the unique God") can make atonement.

Consistent with the depiction of the LORD as a sin-bearer in Ex 34:6-7, Isa 43:24 confirms that the LORD himself "serves" under the iniquity, rebellion, and sins of his people.

> **Isa 43:24** You have made me *serve* for your sins; made me weary with your iniquity (הֶעֱבַדְתַּנִי בְּחַטֹּאותֶיךָ הוֹגַעְתַּנִי בַּעֲוֹנֹתֶיךָ). I am he who blots out your rebellion, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

Isaiah 43:24 does not express an entirely unique idea, but rather unfolds more directly the theological reality seen in God's self-giving response of sin-bearing in passages like Ex 34:6-7, Num 14:18ff, and later in Isa 53.[55] Within the context of the LORD binding himself to Israel in covenant love, Israel, the text says, has actually "forced" the LORD to "serve" for its sins. Instead of cutting his people off for their sins, the LORD, as a servant to them, absorbs and suffers the wrong done to him. This picture of the servant God of Isa 43:24 (and of Ex 34:6-7 and Num 14:18ff) *anticipates* the picture of the Suffering Servant who serves unto death to blot out sins and justify the sinner. The Suffering Servant's servanthood is an extension of the LORD's servanthood found in passages such as Isa 43:24, Ex 34:6-7, and Num 14:18.

4.1.2. הִפְגִּיעַ—A Thematic Echo of פָּקַד

It is important to note the fact that the Servant's voluntary act of sin-bearing is inseparably related to the LORD's "laying" (הִפְגִּיעַ) of sin on the Servant (v.6): "the LORD

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concept of God bearing punishment for human sins, he could have seen that נָשָׂא עָוֹן in those seven cases may legitimately be translated as "suffering punishment" and be interpreted as God vicariously suffering the consequences of human sins, through which process God effects atonement. Then he could have seen that the LORD bearing the punishment of his people is not unique to Ezek 4:4-8 or foreign to the Old Testament.

[55] Isaiah 43:24 is a picture of God as a servant wearied by Israel's sins. This picture clearly contrasts with 43:23: "I [the LORD] have not made you [Israel] to serve with an offering, and I have not made you weary with incense." God has not burdened Israel.

has laid on him the iniquity of us all."[56] That the LORD lays sin upon the Servant means that the Servant suffers its consequences. This act of God's laying sin and punishment on the Servant corresponds to the concept of the LORD "visiting" (פָּקַד) iniquity and punishment on the sinner in Ex 34:7.

One great difference between the two passages is the fact that the iniquity and punishment the LORD "visits" upon the Servant is not his own, but belongs to others ("us all" and/or "the many"). The end result of the LORD "laying" (הִפְגִּיעַ) the sin and punishment of the world on the Servant is that the Servant is "pierced for our rebellion" (מְחֹלָל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ, v.5) and "crushed for our iniquity" (מְדֻכָּא מֵעֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ, v.5). Just as the LORD's "visiting iniquity" (פֹּקֵד עָוֹן) upon sinners in Ex 32 and Num 14 resulted in the death of some Israelites, the LORD's "laying" sin on the Servant results in the great suffering and death of the Servant (see below).

Another significant difference between the Servant's suffering in Isa 53 and Israel's suffering in Ex 32 lies in the fact that the Servant's suffering is undeserved and voluntary whereas the Israel's is deserved and obligatory. The Servant's suffering for the transgressors involves both the LORD's will and his own will, which are shown to be in complete harmony. The Servant voluntarily suffers for the rebellious by way of submitting to the will of the LORD who lays upon him sin and its consequences. This point is supported by the claim that the Servant *offers himself* to be the "guilt offering" אָשָׁם in 53:10.

4.1.3. אָשָׁם—A Thematic Echo of נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה

The term אָשָׁם of 53:10 encapsulates in one word the Servant's identity as one who bears and removes iniquity and brings salvation, peace, and healing to the world. In that sense, the term אָשָׁם can be considered a thematic echo of the expression

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[56] The phrase וַיהוָה הִפְגִּיעַ בּוֹ אֵת עֲוֹן כֻּלָּנוּ may be rendered, "The LORD caused punishment for us all to fall upon him." The phrase conveys the idea that the LORD caused the sin and its deserved punishment to fall upon the Servant. See Holladay (1988: 288) for suggestions on the translation of the term פָּגַע in the Hiphil.

נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה in Ex 34:7.

The Servant intervenes as אָשָׁם, "a guilt offering" or "an offering for sin" (v.10; NRSV). There has been some debate over the meaning of אָשָׁם in this passage. Scholars like H. M. Orlinsky dismiss the entire verse as "corrupt" and "of uncertain meaning."[57] I regard such allegations of textual and semantic uncertainty as overstated. Such exaggeration may be partly due to an unwillingness on the part of some scholars to accept the theological implications of the Servant being the אָשָׁם. Payne rightly points out that "the first part of the verse is textually difficult," but "there is neither doubt nor difficulty over the word . . . *asham*; the Hebrew is to that extent perfectly clear."[58]

Other parts of the passage clarify the theological meaning of verse10. The Servant is innocent ("he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth" in v.9) and righteous ("the righteous one, my Servant" in v.11). These references support the idea that the righteous Servant suffers unto death not for his own sins but for the sins of others. He suffers, because it is the LORD's will to lay on him "the iniquity of us all" (v.6), a will that the Servant voluntarily shares with the LORD.[59] Therefore the Servant's life is an effective אָשָׁם. The life of an involuntary and disobedient one would not provide an efficacious atonement. The Servant's life as an אָשָׁם is efficacious because it is in accordance with the LORD's plan and is accomplished by the Servant's voluntary and obedient self-giving.[60]

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[57] Orlinsky 1967: footnote 7. Also, the NRSV footnote on v.10 says "The meaning of Heb uncertain."

[58] Payne 1971: 142.

[59] As Paul Hanson (1995: 18) points out, the situation in Isa 53 is not a picture of sadism or of the Servant as a mere scapegoat. There is an identification of the will of the Servant with the LORD's will and his "divine redemptive purpose." The identification of the will of the Servant and the will of the LORD is seen in the phrase, "The LORD purposed to crush him and to pierce him. If his life makes a guilt offering (אָשָׁם)" (v.10). That the Servant voluntarily and actively submits himself to suffering is also found in the following verses:

[4] He *bore* our sicknesses and *carried* our pains.

[12] . . . *He poured out his own life* unto death . . .

He bore/forgave the sin of the many, and he *interceded* for their rebellions.

[60] Childs (2001: 415) stresses, "What occurred was not some unfortunate tragedy of human history but actually formed the center of the divine plan for the redemption of this people and indeed of the world." For Whybray's objection to the Servant's life as an efficacious אָשָׁם and my response to it, see below.

This sheds new light on the concept of substitutionary atonement, which, as J.D.W. Watts notes, "had long existed in the sacrificial cult (Lev 16)."[61]

In his commentary on Leviticus, Baruch Levine points out that the אָשָׁם, "usually translated into 'guilt offering,' was actually a penalty paid in the form of a sacrificial offering to God."[62] The provision of אָשָׁם, however, did not apply to rebellion toward and outright rejection of the LORD.[63] The אָשָׁם applied to inadvertent offences. Defiant or premeditated sins against God were "punishable by the penalty known as *karet*, the 'cutting off' of the offender from the community."[64] Therefore, our text in Isa 53 is unusual. What sets apart the אָשָׁם in Isaiah from all the other occurrences of the term אָשָׁם in the Old Testament is twofold: the kind of sins it deals with and the kind of people to whom it applies. In Isaiah (both in light of the comprehensive sin-language in 53:5-6 and the larger context of the book), the אָשָׁם is applied to outright rebellion, defiant acts, rejection of the LORD, and all forms of socio-political sins flowing out of spiritual degeneration. In addition, in Isaiah the atonement is applied not only to Israel, but also to all nations ("the many" רַבִּים in 53:12).[65] The Servant is giving his life as "the penalty paid in the form of a sacrificial offering," the "guilt offering" for all the heinous sins of Israel and the nations.[66] This is clearly an extraordinary achievement.

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[61] JDW Watts 1987: 231.
[62] Levine 1989: 18.
[63] Levine 1989: 18.
[64] Levine 1989: 18.
[65] Although the term רַבִּים is not explicitly defined in the text, "the fact that v.12 parallelizes the many and the sinners seems to support the view that the many are regarded as a more numerous group" than Israel (Spieckermann 2000: 322). Knight (1965: 229, 234) interprets "we" and "the many" as synonyms, both referring to the "humanity at large" or "'virtually all' men."
[66] At this point scholars like Whybray (1978: 65ff) would object to my interpretation of the Servant as an atoning sacrifice on the grounds that human sacrifice is an abomination to the LORD and no human sacrifice is efficacious. The fact that the LORD rejected Moses' offer of his life for the sins of Israel would support Whybray's objection. I agree with Whybray that human sacrifice is clearly forbidden for the reasons he gives. Human sacrifice is also fundamentally against the LORD's mode of reconciliation, which is God's own sin-bearing based on his sovereign freedom to show mercy to sinners. Human sacrifice defies God's way and insists on human merit.

The Servant's death, however, is not merely a human sacrifice or substitution. The Servant of Isa 53 does not belong to the identity of sinful humans. The Servant as the אָשָׁם and his self-sacrifice is different from all prohibited human sacrifices. The Servant's self-sacrifice is acceptable to God and is efficacious to

What is striking about the Servant is that *his entire life* can be described as being an אָשָׁם.[67] From the moment of birth to the moment of death, the Servant bears and suffers for the sins, transgression, and iniquities (v.4-6,8,11-12) of the world and suffers their punishment.[68] Thus scorn, rejection, suffering, infirmities, and diseases characterise the Servant's life (v.2-4). The Servant is wounded, bruised, stricken, and punished for the iniquity, rebellions, and sin that he bears.

The Servant, as the אָשָׁם, ultimately dies a sinner's death despite his innocence. The Servant dies *in identification with and in place of* the rebellious.

> **Isa 53:8c-9b** He was cut off from the land of the living.
> Because of the rebellion of my people, he was stricken to death.
> He put his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.

Bearing the sins of the world, the Servant is "cut off from the land of the living." The Servant is punished by the legal requirement of כָּרֵת, or "cutting off," in his death.[69] The "cutting off" of the innocent Servant starkly contrasts with the preservation of the rebellious Israel who deserves to be "cut off" (48:8-9). The latter is made possible by the former.

The self-sacrificial, vicarious death of the Servant, however, is not the ultimate end of the Servant's career; the Servant will be rewarded.

> **Isa 53:11** Out of the suffering of his life,
> He will see the light and be satisfied.

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bear and remove human sin. The reasons are as follows: First, the Servant is included in the identity of the LORD. Secondly, the text shows that it is the LORD's own will that the Servant be the אָשָׁם; it is none other than the LORD who lays on him "the iniquity of us all" (53:6) that "we" may have peace and healing. The LORD does so because the Servant is the "arm of the LORD" revealed.

[67] Westermann 1969: 261.

[68] Knight (1965: 234) suggests that the terms "rebellion" and "iniquities" of 53:5 may be "the type of all human rebellion."

[69] See Levine's comments, cited above. On the death of the Servant, see, Anthony Ceresko 1994: 44ff and Westermann 1969: 264ff. Whybray (1978: 105-6) argues that the language with reference to the death of the Servant should be taken metaphorically and that the Servant is rewarded at the end shows that he did not suffer death.

In accordance with the introductory verse (52:13) of the Servant Song, these verses speak of the exaltation of the Servant after his humiliation and suffering. New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham points out that there are important intertextual connections between Isa 52:13, 6:1,3, and 57:15 that illumine the meaning of the exaltation of the Servant in 52:13. These three passages all have a rare "combination of the two Hebrew roots *rum* (to be high, to be exalted) and *nasa* (to lift up)."[70]

> **Isa 52:13** Behold, my Servant will prosper;
> he will be *exalted* (יָרוּם) and *lifted up* (וְנִשָּׂא) and be very *high* (וְגָבַהּ מְאֹד).
>
> **Isa 6:1,3** I saw the LORD sitting on a throne, *exalted* (רָם) and *lifted up* (וְנִשָּׂא);
> and his train filled the temple.
> And [the seraphs] were calling to one another,
> "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
> the whole earth is full of his glory."
>
> **Isa 57:15** For thus says the *exalted* (רָם) and *lofty* (וְנִשָּׂא),
> One who inhabits eternity, holy is his name:
> "I dwell in the *high* (אַמָּרוֹם) and holy place,
> and with the crushed and humble in spirit,
> to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the crushed."

Isaiah 52:13 states that the Servant will be "exalted," "lifted up," and "be very high." The repetition of these words of exaltation emphasizes that the Servant will be exalted to the *highest* place. The Servant's exaltation to the highest place becomes clearer when Isa 52:13 is read in light of the other two passages where the combination of the words "exalted" and "lifted up" also occur.[71] In Isa 6:1, the word combination introduces "Isaiah's vision of God on his throne (where the throne is described as 'exalted and lifted up')."[72] In Isa 57:15, the words describe God, "dwelling in the heights of heaven, as himself 'exalted and lifted up.'"[73] When Isa 53:12 is read with reference to 6:1 and 57:15,

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[70] Bauckham 1998: 50.
[71] Thus, Bauckham (1998: 50) draws attention to "the Jewish exegetical principle of *gezera sava*, according to which passages in which the same words occur should be interpreted with reference to each other."
[72] Bauckham 1998: 50.
[73] Bauckham 1998: 50.

one is compelled to see that "the meaning of Isaiah 52:13 is that the Servant is exalted to the heavenly throne of God . . . from which God rules the universe."[74]

The above line of evidence lends force to Bauckham's conclusion: "The Servant, in both his humiliation and his exaltation, is therefore not merely a human figure distinguished from God, but, in both his humiliation and his exaltation, *belongs to the identity of the unique God.*"[75] This statement is not only theologically striking but also exegetically compelling. Bauckham's argument gains strength from Isa 2:12-18 in which the LORD makes an unambiguous statement that he tolerates no rival: "The LORD alone will be exalted in that day" (2:18). That the LORD will exalt the Servant to the throne of God means the Servant is someone who "belongs to the identity of the unique God."[76] The comments made by Peter Wilcox and David Paton-Williams reinforce Bauckham's suggestion:

> Throughout Isa. 1-66, the adjectives "exalted," "lifted up" and "very high" are virtually technical terms, applied almost exclusively to Yahweh. Indeed, the particular thrust of Isa. 1-6 is that only Yahweh may be described in these terms . . . there *is* an implication here that the servant's work is Yahweh's work, and the language used to make the point is daring, to say the least.[77]

The interpretations given in Bauckham's book and the article by Wilcox and Paton-Williams are not entirely surprising, since the echoes of Ex 34:6-7 in Isa 53:5-12 affirm the unique identity of the Servant as belonging to the LORD's identity.

After the Servant exaltation, the Servant will justify (יַצְדִּיק) "the many."

> **Isa 53:11c-12** Out of the suffering of his soul, he will see the light and be satisfied; By his knowledge my righteous servant will *justify the many*[78] and he will carry their iniquities. *Therefore* I will apportion to him *the many*; and the strong he will

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[74] Bauckham 1998: 51.

[75] Bauckham 1998: 51.

[76] Bauckham 1998: 51.

[77] Wilcox and Paton-Williams 1988: 95. But, unlike Bauckham, they state, "The implication is not necessarily that the servant is Yahweh, or even divine."

[78] Westermann (1969: 267-8), after Mowinckel, suggests the translation, "My Servant will show himself to be righteous [*yasdiq*, an internal causative] (and so stand) as righteous before the many," and provides the explanation, "that is to say, my Servant will stand as righteous before the many because he bore their sins.

apportion as spoil, *because* he poured out his life to death, and was numbered with the rebellious.

The Servant will be able to justify "the many" as a result of his vicarious death for their sins. Just as a victorious warrior would take the spoils of a great victory, so the Servant will justify "the many" and "the strong" and claim them as his rewards from the LORD.

4.1.4. פָּגַע—Another Thematic Echo of נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה

The last verse of the Servant Song closes the Song with a summary statement of the Servant's mission of sin/punishment-bearing and removing before his exaltation: "He bore the sin of the many; and he interceded for the rebellious" (וְהוּא חֵטְא־רַבִּים נָשָׂא וְלַפֹּשְׁעִים יַפְגִּיעַ, v.12).[79] The expressions "bearing sin" (נָשָׂא חֵטְא) and "interceding for sinners" (וְלַפֹּשְׁעִים יַפְגִּיעַ) can be viewed as mutually inclusive, parallel thoughts here. If so, the expression וְלַפֹּשְׁעִים יַפְגִּיעַ may be considered as another thematic echo of the expression נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה. It is interesting to note that the root פָּגַע is used with the LORD as the subject in v.6 with the meaning of "laid upon" (הִפְגִּיעַ בְּ). The same root פָּגַע is used in verse12 with the Servant as the subject: "he intervened for (יַפְגִּיעַ לְ) the rebellious." The two usages of the root פָּגַע in Isa 53 may be interpreted as putting emphasis on the important theological idea that the Servant intervenes for the rebellious by bearing the sin and punishment that the LORD lays upon him.

In the golden calf incident in Ex 32-34, Israel goes astray, turning away from the LORD. Israel in the Servant Song confesses a similar state of sin: "We all went astray like sheep; each to one's way—we have turned" (53:6).[80] Israel in Isaiah is in a state of apostasy and is therefore unable to intercede either for itself or for the nations. In the exchange between Moses and the LORD in Ex 32-34, it is clear that only the LORD can

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The words then express God's justification of the Servant previously condemned in shame, and his declaring of him as righteous. God rehabilitates the Servant and restores his honour."

[79] Westermann (1969: 269) correctly points out that "to intervene" "does not mean, as some editors imagine, that he made prayers of intercession for them. Rather, it means that with his life, his suffering and his death, he took their place and underwent their punishment in their stead."

[80] The "we" is taken as referring to Israel. See Hugenberger 1995: 110.

intervene to make atonement for Israel's rebellion and apostasy (see Chapter 2). This is also the case in Isaiah.

In the "arm of the LORD" songs of Isa 59:2-15 and 63, the LORD laments the fact that he looked for an "intercessor" but found no one. Israel, whose calling is to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6), foments oppression, revolt, lies, violence, rebellion, injustice, and treachery (Isa 59:2-15). The expressions of quest, dismay, and resolution in 59:15f are repeated in 63:3-5. The LORD says, "From the nations, no one was with me." "I looked, but there was no one to help, and I was appalled that no one upheld me; so my own arm saved for me." No intercessor is found from Israel or the nations. Thus, the LORD's own "arm" intercedes for Israel and the nations. Thus, the work of "intervention" or "intercession" (מַפְגִּיעַ; 59:16) that works salvation for the world is solely attributed to the "arm of the LORD" in these passages.[81]

In a similar way, in Isa 51-53, it is the "arm of the LORD" that is expected to bring salvation to the world. Accordingly, there are several intertextual connections between Isa 53:1, 51:5-10, and 52:8 that manifest this motif.[82]

> **Isa 51:5-10** My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way.
> And *my arm* will bring justice to the nations.
> The islands will look to *me* and wait in hope for *my arm* . . .
> [8] . . . My righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.
> [9]Awake, Awake! Clothe yourself with strength, *O arm of the LORD* . . .
> [10] Was it not *you* who dried up the sea . . . so that the redeemed might cross over?
>
> **Isa 52:8-10** When *the LORD* returns to Zion . . .
> [10]The LORD will lay *bare his holy arm* in the sight of all the nations,
> and all the ends of the earth will see *the salvation of our God.*
>
> **Isa 53:1** Who can believe what we have heard,
> To whom has *the arm of the LORD* been revealed?
> [2]*He* grew up before [the LORD] like a tender shoot . . .

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[81] The song also shows that the "intervention" by the LORD's arm involves vengeance, which the text emphatically declares is sustained by righteousness. This righteous vengeance involves "repaying" Israel and the nations "their due" which will inspire the nations to fear and worship the LORD (salvation!). The LORD "repaid" Israel their due in forms of warfare and exile (27:8).

[82] Similar connections could be noted with respect to the "arm of the LORD" songs of Isa 59:2-15 and 63 mentioned above.

Significantly, in 51:5-10 and 52:8-10, the "arm of the LORD" refers to the LORD himself in action.[83] In 51:5-10, the "arm of the LORD" is used more or less interchangeably with the LORD (the "me" of 51:5 and the "you" of v.10). It should be recognised that, even as the "face" (פָּנִים) of the LORD refers to the LORD himself in other contexts such as Ex 33,[84] the "arm" (זְרוֹעַ) of the LORD in these passages refers to the LORD himself rather than simply to the "power of God.[85] The "arm of the LORD" is a motif of the LORD's activity of salvation.[86]

Thus, in 51:5-10 the "arm of the LORD" is evoked to describe the LORD acting now as the LORD had in the day of Moses. "Without the coming of Yahweh there can be no salvation."[87] Again, in 52:8-10, expectation is "focused on the LORD himself, with the metaphor ["arm"] underlining that he is looked for in person and in power."[88] In 53:1, the "arm of the LORD" has already been revealed, and the "we" who witnessed the revelation of the "arm of the LORD" describe what they have heard and seen in 53:2ff. In other words, the statement "he [the Servant] grew up before him like a tender shoot" (v.2), which immediately follows the assertion that the "arm of the LORD" has been revealed, actually begins to describe *how* the "arm of the LORD" has been revealed. Verse 2 also begins to answer the question of why the message concerning the revelation of the "arm of the LORD"

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[83] Beginning in chapter 40, several passages speak of the salvific work the "arm of the LORD" (40:9-11; 51:4-10; 52:10; 53:2; 59:1,16ff; 63:1ff).

[84] The anthropomorphic metaphors "face" (פָּנִים) and "arm" (זְרוֹעַ) can be understood as instances of a kind of metonymy in which a noun for a part (here arm, or face) is used in place of a noun for a whole (the LORD himself). Again, the "arm" (זְרוֹעַ) of the LORD may be identified with the LORD, just as in Ex 33 the "face" (פָּנִים) of the LORD" is God-self rather than a separate human agent. The relationship between the "face" (פָּנִים) of the LORD and the LORD as in Ex 33 serves as an instructive analogy for the relationship between the "arm" (זְרוֹעַ) of the LORD and the LORD in Isaiah passages. If the "face" (פָּנִים) of the LORD emphasizes the intimacy or perhaps guidance of the LORD, the "arm" (זְרוֹעַ) of the LORD may be understood as laying emphasis on the power, righteousness, salvation, and justice of the LORD.

[85] For the direct association of the "arm" with the power, see Isa 50:2; 62:8; 63:11-12, but even in these passages the "arm" can be identified with the LORD. Brueggemann sees 52:10 as rhetoric about God as a king (1997: 247) or a warrior, who "will fight against and defeat all the illicit claimants to public power," (24). While the "arm" as a metaphor of God's power is found in passages like Ex 6:6 and 15:16, Isa 52:10 is best interpreted in relation to the Servant of 53.

[86] Motyer 1993: 404-405. North (1952: 120) notes, "The conception of Yahweh's arm as the instrument of deliverance and judgment occurs frequently in Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 4:34), usually when recalling the Exodus from Egypt, 'with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm.'"

[87] RE Watts 1997: 199; cf. 80.

[88] Motyer 1993: 409

is so unbelievable (v.1), namely, that it comes in the form of a "tender shoot" rather than an obvious display of power.[89] The structure of the early part of the Servant Song presents 53:2ff as explaining how the "arm of the LORD" is revealed through the Suffering Servant.

Accordingly, the same language used to describe the "arm of the LORD" in 51:5ff is also used of the Servant of the LORD in another Servant Song in 42:1ff. [90]

> **Isa 51:5-10** My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way.
> And my arm will bring justice to the nations.
> The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm . . .
> [8] . . . My righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations.
> [9]Awake, Awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the LORD . . .
> [10] Was it not you who dried up the sea . . . so that the redeemed might cross over?
>
> **Isa 42:1** Here is my Servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight;
> I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nation . . .
> [3] . . . in faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
> [4]He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.
> In his law the islands will put their hope.

When 53:1-2 is read in the light of 42:1-4 and 51:5ff, the connection between the "arm of the LORD" and the Servant becomes clearer.[91] The anticipated Servant of Isa 42 and the

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[89] The description of the Suffering Servant that immediately follows the question in 53:1 seems to be more occupied with answering the implicit question of "How" the "arm of the LORD" is revealed. The answer to the explicit question "To whom?" is best found in the larger context. It is to those in Zion (52:8; "When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes." These probably are the "we" of the Servant Song) and the nations (52:10; "The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.")

[90]There are several similarities between the accomplishments of the Servant in chapter 42 and the accomplishments of the LORD or the "arm of the LORD" in chapter 51. The "arm of the LORD" will work out justice for the world "without fail" and his salvation will "last forever" "through all generations" (51:5). Likewise, the Servant will succeed in establishing justice on earth (42:4), which is emphatically stated three times. The LORD will make the Servant to be "a covenant for the people" (42:6) even as the "arm of the LORD" will be "a light for the nations" (51:4). Such work and status of the Servant and the "arm of the LORD" will persist "*until* justice is established on earth" (42:4: cf. 51:6,8). In all these ways, the Servant can be identified with the "arm of the LORD". Indeed, only the "arm of the LORD" who is consistently mighty and who is consistently servant-like can establish justice on earth.

[91] Westermann (1969: 258) rightly points out the intertextual references that inseparably connect 42:1-4 and 52:13-53:12, the former as "the origin of the Servant's work" and the latter as "its culmination." As Westermann points out, "the opening words" of the Suffering Servant Song "hark back to the designation of the servant in 42.1-4." He continues, "This began, 'behold my Servant, whom I uphold'; and 52.13 also begins, 'behold my Servant'. There can be no doubt that this is deliberate. The two songs go together." The opening words establish their mutual interpretative relationship. Childs (2001: 412) makes the observation that "this intertextual reference to 42:1 has been decisively affected by the subsequent call in 49:1ff., which transferred the office of the servant from the nation Israel to the individual prophetic figure of 49:3. . . . Then in 50:4ff, following the sequence of the prophetic narrative, the reception of his call as God's servant is

eagerly awaited "arm of the LORD" of Isa 51:5ff (and 52:8ff) converge in the Suffering Servant of the Servant Song. The "arm of the LORD" is revealed through the Servant's intercession (פָּגַע), atonement, and justification. As the "arm of the LORD" revealed, the Servant completes the salvation plan of the LORD. The Servant "will be exalted and lifted up and be very high" (Isa 52:13) and all nations will come to "knowledge of the one light of Yahweh."[92]

If the Servant is the "arm of LORD" revealed, then it is fitting that the Servant bears and removes human sin even as the LORD does in Ex 34:7 and Num 14:18. What the Servant shows about the LORD is consistent with the attributes and acts of the LORD revealed in Ex 32-34 and Num 14. In Ex 32-34 and Num 14, the LORD is one who patiently serves his people, bearing and removing human sin, guilt, and its consequences. Isaiah 43:24 portrays God as a "servant" who removes Israel's sin by bearing it. The Servant Song portrays the Servant as one who, according to the will of the LORD and by his own will, is offered up as a sin offering to make atonement for Israel and the nations. In a sense, the "arm of the LORD" being revealed through the Servant to suffer for the sins of the world is not an entirely new concept; it is a natural outworking of the LORD's identity as the sin-bearer/remover in Ex 34.

If the "arm of the LORD" (53:1) is revealed as the Suffering Servant, then the Servant can indirectly show what the LORD is like. Thus, in the following three subsections (4.1.5-4.1.7), I will raise a series of questions concerning the relationship between divine mercy and judgment that are relevant to the Servant Song and address those questions with reference to the theological ideas found in the echoed terms of Ex 34:6-7 in Isa 53:5-12.

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related as he is tortured and humiliated by his oppressors, who are not from outside, but from within the nation of Israel itself."

[92] Seitz 2001 (*Isaiah 40-66*): 464.

4.1.5. The Sovereignty of God as Self-Giving

Brueggemann has suggested that God's sovereignty is at odds with his self-giving solidarity with his people. For Brueggemann, God's sovereignty is basically an expression of self-commitment or self-regard (see 227ff; 271ff), and can be expressed in unfettered violence towards his people. God's solidarity, by contrast, is at times expressed in his overindulgence of his people. Such a "disjunctive" perspective runs through Brueggemann's interpretation of Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes, including Isa 54. In this passage, God, whose "self" has been bruised by Israel, is portrayed as expressing his self-regard (or sovereignty) in uncontrolled violence against Israel, with no juridical commitment[93] and without any intention of restoring Israel.[94] In this way of imaging God, divine sovereignty serves no one but God, whose "self" is hurt and purposelessly vengeful. While Brueggemann does not present such a picture of God explicitly in relation to the Servant Song, since the Servant Song is intricately related to Isa 54 the Servant Song (along with Ex 34:6-7 and other echoes treated in the thesis) can provide an alternate way of understanding divine sovereignty that is not contradictory to divine solidarity in relation to Isa 54.

In Ex 32-34 and Num 14, the LORD absorbs and suffers the wrong done to him and affirms a continued life of Israel with the LORD. God exercises his sovereign freedom to bear sin and its consequences and to show mercy to those who deserve destruction. In so doing, the LORD reveals the unique divine identity (i.e. that he is unlike any other gods) to be one in whom sovereign freedom is expressed in compassionate and gracious self-giving.

Consistent with the Exodus and Numbers passages, Isa 53 also presents divine sovereignty as a form of "self-giving." That is, the LORD reveals his "arm" in and through the Servant, who submits himself to suffering in order to bring reconciliation and righteousness to the sinner. The Servant is able to efficaciously suffer for the sinner and

[93] Brueggemann 1997: 384.
[94] Brueggemann 1997: 439.

reconcile the sinner to God because he "belongs to the identity of the unique God." Thus the Servant's suffering is consistent with and a natural outworking of the LORD's identity as one who exercises his sovereign freedom to bear and remove sin in order to grant life to the sinner as found in Ex 32-34 and Num 14. In addition, if the Servant is the "arm of the LORD" revealed and belongs to the identity of God, then through the Servant's suffering, God also suffers. If so, then the Servant's suffering shows not only the Servant's own self-giving servanthood, but also that of the LORD (or the "arm of the LORD"). As Bauckham rightly states, the LORD's "self-giving in abasement and service" through the Servant "ensures that his sovereignty over all things is also a form of his self-giving."[95] Furthermore, "the career of the Servant of the LORD, his suffering, humiliation, death and exaltation, is the way in which the sovereignty of the one true God comes to be acknowledged by all the nations."[96]

The self-giving quality of God is an aspect of the LORD's constant character found in Ex 32-34, Num 14, and now in Isa 53. And that self-giving quality is what consistently marks divine sovereignty in those passages. When God's holiness and justice demand the destruction of the sinner, God exercises his sovereign freedom to reconcile the sinner to God by bearing sin and its consequences (in the case of Isaiah, this is manifested through the atoning sacrifice of the Servant who is the "arm of the LORD" revealed). Self-sacrifice should not in any way be set in opposition to divine sovereignty, as Brueggemann has done.

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[95] Bauckham 1998: 61. See also his related comment: "And when the nations acknowledge his unique deity and turn to him for salvation, it is the Servant, humiliated and now exalted to sovereignty on the divine throne, whom they acknowledge" (51).

[96] Bauckham 1998: 59. Bauckham (1998: 61) continues, "But since the exalted [Servant] is first the humiliated [Servant], since indeed it is because of his self-abnegation that he is exalted, his humiliation belongs to the identity of God as truly as his exaltation does. The identity of God—who God is—is revealed as much in self-abasement and service as it is in exaltation and rule."

4.1.6. Compatibility between Divine Justice and the Servant's Vicarious Suffering

Some scholars may raise theological objections to my interpretation that sinners are made righteous because of the innocent Servant who is punished for sinners. Put differently, some may fail to see how God's punishment of the innocent Servant and God's justification of sinners on the basis of the Servant's suffering can be compatible with God's justice. Such failure arises from seeing the Servant's vicarious suffering as necessarily implying that "the sinful get off scot-free" at his expense.[97] R. N. Whybray makes the related point that the Old Testament does not provide for acquitting guilty persons, because to acquit the guilty would be a heinous crime.[98] In fact, in the context of God's definitive self-revelation, God is called one who does not acquit the guilty (Ex 34:7; see Chapter 2). Holding the sinner accountable for sin is central to God's righteous character. Thus, the Servant's vicarious suffering appears to be at odds with the divine righteous character that would not acquit the guilty or punish the innocent. In my interpretation of Isa 53, the guilty seem to go unpunished, or, in Brueggemann's terms, solidarity is shown apart from "sovereignty." Further, the innocent seem to be unjustly punished; "sovereignty" is exercised beyond the bounds of justice. If this is so, then Isaiah 53 seems to posit a view of God that is different from that of Ex 34:6-7 as we have interpreted it.

However, the posited objections flow out of an *a priori* definition of vicariousness. Whybray associates vicariousness with "the crime of acquitting the guilty" in the passages that rightly indict dishonest judges who acquit the guilty (perhaps having been bribed by the rich).[99] A miscarriage of justice by a dishonest judge, however, does not fall in the same category as the merciful judge Yahweh who provides a way of atonement through a

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[97] Orlinsky (1967: 59) would object to my view that the Servant's suffering is vicarious. Orlinsky defines vicariousness as a situation of exchange in which "the sinful get off scot-free, at the expense" of another. He then proceeds to reject such a notion as unbiblical.

[98] Whybray 1978: 66,57.

[99] Whybray (1978: 57) rightly regards acquitting the guilty as "being especially heinous, being included in a serious of solemn 'woes' in Isa. 5:23 and described as 'abomination to Yahweh' (תּוֹעֲבַת יְהוָה) in Prov. 17:15."

unique vicarious suffering of the Servant of Isa 53. The human judicial institution is required by God to administer retributive justice in which the punishment fits the crime. But God has the sovereign freedom and power to "absorb" (in himself or through the Servant) the wrong done him, suffer the consequence of human sin, and show mercy to the sinner. The Servant's making "the many" righteous does not contradict divine justice or requirement for just punishment, since the justification of the sinner rests on the requirement for just punishment satisfied by God through the Servant. God's Servant's actions of bearing human sin and absorbing the consequent punishment do not in any way contradict justice. Rather, they uniquely define divine justice. That is, divine justice includes mercy or may be expressed in mercy. Conversely, divine mercy includes justice, so that mercy is not a matter of acquitting the guilty but of mitigating the punishment.

This point has already been demonstrated in Ex 34:6-7 and Num 14 in Chapters 2 and 3. The LORD himself bears Israel's sin and its consequences so as not to "cut off" Israel from God. Such divine sin-bearing does not exclude an appropriate measure of punishment for God's people. The LORD's sin-bearing *mitigates rather than eliminates judgment or punishment*. Likewise, the Servant's sin-bearing (or the LORD's punishment of the Servant) is not a matter of completely acquitting the guilty, but is rather taking the brunt of the punishment so as to affirm the continued existence of sinners and to reconcile them to God. The Servant's sin-bearing, parallel to the LORD's sin-bearing, brings mitigation of punishment rather than elimination of it.

There are ongoing disciplinary punishments even after the Servant vicariously suffers. People may continue to suffer many of the consequences of their sin even after atonement has been made. The Servant's atoning work does not guarantee that everyone from Israel and the nations will be automatically saved from judgment. Only those who believe the "good news" announced by the messenger will enter the holy city of Zion and

be saved.[100] As Childs says, "The note had already been sounded in 50:10-11 that the response to the servant would divide the people of Israel into two groups, those who believe and those who oppose."[101] An invitation to abundant life in Zion is given to all, but only those who hear and obey will be saved, and those who rebel against the LORD will be destroyed. Even after the Servant's work, salvation comes only to those who choose to receive it and serve the LORD.

God's work through the Servant upholds God's righteous character as revealed in Ex 34:6-7. The LORD's punishment of the Servant and his mercy for sinners do not compromise divine justice, but define it. The Servant is punished because of God's compassion toward sinners, and sinners receive mercy because of the vicarious punishment of the Servant. Those who reject the Servant reject the LORD's way of atoning sin and granting righteousness and are therefore ultimately destroyed. All of these divine acts flow out of and are united in the self-giving and serving character and work of the LORD.

4.1.7. Compatibility between the Punishment of the Servant and the Punishment of Israel and the Nations.

In the foregoing discussion, I have begun to suggest the compatibility between the vicarious suffering of the Servant and the punishment of the sinner. In this subsection, I will develop this idea further. It has been noted that in Isa 40:2 God declares that Israel's "sin has been paid for; she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins." Orlinsky points out that Israel had already been punished for her sins—"in the form of destruction at home and two generations of captivity abroad—and had thereby *fully expiated her sinfulness* (40:1-2; italics mine)."[102] The text of 40:2 certainly would seem to

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[100] Thus, 54:17 speaks of those who responded to the "good news" and are in Zion and those who apparently rejected the "good news" and are against Zion.

[101] Childs 2001: 414. There are those who reject and oppose the Servant and Zion, perhaps because what the LORD did through the Servant is beyond belief and hard to accept. As Isaiah 53:1 says, "Who could have believed what we have heard?" The revelation of the "arm of the LORD" through the Servant and the Servant's humiliation and exaltation are indeed "doubt-inspiring."

[102] Orlinsky 1967: 58. Hooker (1959: 46) explains the "double" (כִּפְלַיִם) suffering of the nation of Israel by postulating that Israel suffers not only for its own sins, but also vicariously on behalf of all the nations ("the many"). The term (כִּפְלַיִם) occurs only in one other place in Job. The term כִּפְלַיִם is a dual form, derived

support the idea of the "completeness" of Israel's suffering; "her service is complete" and "her punishment is accepted [or her iniquity is paid for]." Thus, the LORD's punishment of the Servant for the sins of Israel appears to be at odds with Israel's punishment in exile.[103] Ultimately, God appears to be unjust.

The compatibility between the Servant's suffering for "us" (Israel) and the punishment of Israel in exile can be seen in the following factors. In Deutero-Isaiah, the unmitigated punishment of Israel would be a total destruction of Israel. But what is counted as "full" punishment for Israel falls short of total destruction. The word "full" in 40:2 then would mean the full amount of sin and punishment that the LORD chooses to "visit" (פָּקַד) upon Israel rather than the full amount *deserved* by Israel. The "full" amount is "all that God required her to pay,"[104] rather than what Israel's sin requires. Thus, in Isa 48:9 the LORD says that in divine patience the LORD holds back from cutting Israel off, from utterly destroying Israel. Also, Isa 27:7-9 speaks of Israel's "exile" as "all the fruit of the removal of her sin" (כָּל־פְּרִי הָסֵר חַטָּאתוֹ), which stands in contrast to the destruction meted out to some nations as the full punishment required to remove their sin. An important theological point is that while punishment purifies Israel and the nations to *some* degree (by removing the sin and sinners), it is insufficient to reconcile either Israel or the nations to God. God's own sin-bearing/removing or divine atonement is what makes possible the continued life of Israel and the nations with the LORD. Full reconciliation with

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from כָּפַל, which means "to double over" (Sarna, *Exodus*, 168, 180) or "to fold double" (Ex. 26:9; 28:16; 39:9; see, Motyer 1993: 299; cf. Holladay 1988: 163). Hooker clearly overplays the importance of this obscure term and of her chosen meaning for it. Gerhard von Rad and others have suggested a legitimate alternative meaning for the term כִּפְלַיִם, namely, "equivalent" (Von Rad, as cited in Whybray 1978: 62). If he is right, a similar usage is found in the related word מִשְׁנֶה. In Deut 17:18 מִשְׁנֶה means "copy" of the Law. In other places, מִשְׁנֶה is translated into "double," conveying the idea of "fullest measure" or "complete" (Deut 21:17; 2 Kg 2:9; 61:7). Childs (2001: 297) correctly says, "The reference to 'double for all her sins' is not to suggest that Israel received more punishment than deserved." He continues, "But rather the author makes use of a legal image already found in Ex. 22:3(4), which requires a guilty one to restore double for a crime." If so, "double" (כִּפְלַיִם) here would refer to what is legally appropriate.

[103] Orlinsky 1967: 58.

[104] Seitz 2001 (*Isaiah 40-66*): 334.

the Holy One of Israel is achievable only as sinners atone for their own sins (by receiving due punishment) *and* the LORD atones through divine sin-bearing.

While the biblical texts do not quantify the "amount" of sin the LORD bears or "visits" back on sinners, they point to the mutually-inclusive nature of divine sin-bearing and atonement and sinners' atonement by their own sin-bearing. The LORD requires some form of atonement by sinners, perhaps through some form of punishment. But since that is insufficient to fully justify and reconcile the sinner to God, the LORD ultimately provides the means of justification and reconciliation through divine atonement, which in Isa 53 is accomplished through the Servant's work. Thus the reconciliation of Israel and the nations to God in Isa 54 should be viewed as the result of *both* the ultimate punishment (כָּרַת) of the Servant *and* the mitigated (though severe) punishment of sinners who otherwise deserve destruction. The Servant's suffering and Israel's suffering are mutually inclusive, rather than exclusive, and both are consistent with the LORD's just and merciful character as revealed in Ex 34:6-7.

4.1.8. Excursus: On the Grammar of Vicariousness

I have stated above that scholars like Orlinsky would deny the vicarious nature of the Servant's suffering.[105] Orlinsky insists that the Servant's suffering is identificational[106] and merely an "occupational hazard" of the prophet.[107] Orlinsky believes that his view is confirmed by the grammatical details of the passage. I have argued in previous subsections for the presence of vicariousness in Isa 53 based on the function of the thematic echoes of

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[105]He even claims that the concept of vicarious suffering (whether an individual or a nation) is foreign to the Old Testament, including Isaiah 53. Orlinsky (1967: 73-74) also asserts that intertestamental Judaism knew nothing of a suffering messiah and that Christians adapted it from Hellenism. His assertion seems to be called into question more and more by additional evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls (Oswalt 1998: 381).

[106] Orlinsky 1967; cf. Whybray 1983: 74-78.

[107] Orlinsky believes that the Servant was a prophetic spokesman who simply shared in or identified with the suffering of his people like all the other prophetic spokespersons (1967: 56-57). Westermann (1969: 257, 261), however, points out that unlike other suffering individuals in the Old Testament, the Servant's entire life is stamped with suffering: "he grew up . . . he was buried." In addition, the Servant's suffering is his intention and the LORD's intention, which is quite different from an "occupational hazard."

Ex 34:6-7 in Isa 53, but in this excursus I will offer criticism of Orlinsky's grammatical argument against the presence of vicariousness in Isa 53.

Referring to 53:5, Orlinsky says, "If the author of these verses had intended here something of vicariousness, he would probably have employed not מ(עֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ) מ(פִּשָּׁעֵנוּ מִדְכָּא) מ(וְהוּא מְחֹלָל) but ב . . . ב (the bet of exchange)."[108] Orlinsky then suggests that the מ in verses 5 and 8 is likely causal.[109]

I agree with Orlinsky that the מ in verses 5 and 8 is most likely causal. It is however unwise to try to deny the presence of vicariousness in 53 based on the usage of preposition מ instead of ב in verses 5 and 8. Orlinsky's suggestion that the author of 53:5 would have used ב . . . ב (the *beth pretii*) in lieu of מ . . . מ at first sounds appropriate, but a further examination shows that it is misleading.

(1) A simple substitution of the preposition ב . . . ב in lieu of מ . . . מ itself would *not* guarantee vicariousness. The reason for this is that there are many cases where the preposition ב is used in a *causal* sense ("because of") with words like עָוֹן, פֶּשַׁע and חַטָּאָה (respectively, Num 27:3; Jer 51;6/Neh 9:37; Jer 17:3/Isa 50:1; Mic 1:5). There is no clear evidence that using ב . . . ב in lieu of מ . . . מ in Isa 53:5 would automatically have expressed vicariousness since both carry a causal sense. In other words, 53:5 either with ב . . . ב or מ . . . מ can be equally and legitimately translated as "he suffered *because* of our rebellion; he was crushed *because* of our iniquity."

(2) In addition, the following evidence about the proper use of the *beth pretii* reveals that the author would not have used the *beth pretii* in lieu of מ . . . מ to express vicariousness as Orlinsky suggests. This is because the use of the *beth pretii* in lieu of מ . . . מ would render the verse unintelligible, as I will now explain.

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[108] Orlinsky 1967: 57.

[109] It should be noted that the *beth pretii* does not always require a second *beth* (so also with the *mem*). See Isa 7:23 below and also the text in Isa 53.

Some good examples of the *beth pretii*, which Orlinsky argues is essential for true vicariousness, are found in the following passages:

> **Lev 27:10** "He must not exchange it or substitute
> טוֹב בְּרָע אוֹ־רַע בְּטוֹב
> a good one *for* a bad, or a bad one *for* a good;
> if he substitutes one animal for another animal"
>
> **Deut 19:21** נֶפֶשׁ בְּנֶפֶשׁ עַיִן בְּעַיִן
> Life *for* life, eye *for* eye
>
> **Isa 7:23** אֶלֶף גֶּפֶן בְּאֶלֶף כָּסֶף
> A thousand vines *at* a thousand silver

The *beth pretii* is used in between the two parties or objects of comparable kind (animal-animal, human-human) or value (good-bad, eye-eye, vines-silver). What are *not* expressed in these phrases are the *causes* (as the *causal* מ-phrase does in 53:5) that express *why* an exchange is required (or forbidden). Thus, if 53:5 were to have an expression of exchange or substitution of one person, "he," *in place of* many sinful persons, "us," the *beth pretii* should be used in between "he" and "us," the two parties of comparable kind. The verse then would look something like this:

> וְהוּא מְחֹלָל (בְּנוּ) מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ
> מְדֻכָּא (בְּנוּ) מֵעֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ
> He was pierced (*in place of us*) because of our rebellion;
> He was crushed (*in place of us*) because of our iniquity.

This construction expresses the idea of *exchange* (ב) between *he* and *us* (and *the rationale* [מ] for the exchange).

If Orlinsky insists on the *beth pretii* in lieu of מ . . . מ in 53:5, the phrase would read, "he suffered *in place of* our sins; he was crushed *in place of* our iniquity." But, such a sentence is absurd, since one cannot speak of a person substituting for a sin (they are not of equal or comparable value). Rather, one speaks of a person substituting (ב) for another person(s) *because of* (ב or מ) sin. What Orlinsky thinks the author would have said in order to express vicariousness is mistaken.

(3) There is an expression for human vicariousness, which is *forbidden*, found in Deut 24:16:

Deut 24:16 לֹא־יוּמְתוּ אָבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים
וּבָנִים לֹא־יוּמְתוּ עַל־אָבוֹת
אִישׁ בְּחֶטְאוֹ יוּמָתוּ
Parents will not be put to death *for* their children
and children will not be put to death *for* their parents.
Each person for his own sin will be put to death.

The *first two* phrases, the father being put to death in place of the son, or the son in place of the father, perfectly express vicariousness, which is *forbidden* here. The preposition used to express the idea of substitution here is עַל. Therefore, the following would be a good suggestion for Isa 53:5:

וְהוּא מְחֹלָל (עַלֵּינוּ) מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ
מְדֻכָּא (עַלֵּינוּ) מֵעֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ
He suffered (*in place of us*) because of our rebellion;
He was crushed (*in place of us*) because of our iniquity.

But Isa 53:5 does not have the preposition that expresses the idea of substitution. The expression in Isa 53:5 is comparable to the *third* phrase of Deut 24:16:

Deut 24:16c אִישׁ בְּחֶטְאוֹ יוּמָתוּ
Each will die *because of his own sin.*

Isa 53:5 וְהוּא מְחֹלָל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ מְדֻכָּא מֵעֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ
He was pierced for our rebellions; he was crushed *because of our iniquity.*

In both Deut 24:16c and Isa 53:5, whether it is an other's sin or one's own sin, the sin stands in a causal relationship to the subject; the subject does not stand in a vicarious relationship to the sin. Father-son and son-father are in vicarious relationship in Deut 24:16. In Isa 53:5, the specific expression "in place of us" (either עַלֵּינוּ or בָּנוּ) is all but abbreviated. This, however, does not necessarily imply that the concept of vicariousness is not present in Isa 53. There are other expressions that point toward the vicarious nature of the Servant's suffering in verses 6, 10, and 12, which are discussed above.

4.2. A Contextual, Theological Exegesis of Isaiah 54:7-10: Benefits of the Servant's Suffering and Exaltation and the Compatibility of Exile and Everlasting Covenant of Peace

In my discussion of Isa 53, I have addressed the issues of the constancy of divine character in Isa 53, the nature of divine sovereignty, and the compatibility of the *suffering of the Servant* and the severe *punishment of sinners*. Here, I will address further the compatibility of God's severe *punishment* of Israel (and the nations) in the past and God's *everlasting covenant of love and peace* for Israel (and the nations) now being offered. I begin with a brief consideration of the affirmations of divine mercy and judgment found in Isa 54.

4.2.1. Everlasting Covenant of Peace Announced

The atoning work of the Suffering Servant of Isa 53 effects the dramatic change from severe divine punishment of Israel and the nations to the universal and everlasting covenant of peace for the servants of the LORD. Thus, the opening verses of Isa 54 issue a call to Zion to celebrate in songs and shouts of joy (54:1). The LORD had abandoned Zion for "a brief moment" "in a surge of anger" (v.7-8). But now the LORD will re-establish Zion in a "covenant of peace" (v.10). Zion is called to enlarge her tent for the inclusion of the nations (v.3). Since the LORD is "the God of all the earth" (v.4), the nations are invited to join themselves to the LORD to serve him (56:6). The old era is gone; a new age of peace has dawned on Zion.

Various terms related to reconciliation are used in Isa 54:7-12 to stress this point. The expressions of the LORD's merciful character seen in Ex 34:6 are used repeatedly here. The term "compassion" appears three times: "with great compassion" (וּבְרַחֲמִים גְּדֹלִים, v.7b), "I will have compassion on you" (רִחַמְתִּיךְ, v.8b), and "who has compassion on you" (מְרַחֲמֵךְ, v.10). The term "steadfast covenant love" appears twice: "everlasting covenant love" (וּבְחֶסֶד עוֹלָם, v.8) and "my steadfast covenant love" (וְחַסְדִּי, v.10). In addition, the expression "my covenant of peace" (וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי, v.10) is used, of which

"covenant" may be regarded as a contextual echo of the same term used in Ex 34:10, and "peace" as a thematic echo (of the peace the LORD granted Israel following the divine self-revelation in 34:10ff). All these terms together strongly emphasize that divine wrath and anger are no more, and a new era of peace has dawned on Zion. The LORD swears never to be angry with or rebuke Zion again (v.9), for the LORD's covenant love will not depart nor his covenant of peace be removed (v.10).

The new covenant the LORD establishes with Zion is universal and abiding in nature.[110] The LORD's likening the new covenant to the Noahic covenant brings out this point.[111] By means of the flood, the LORD cleanses the earth of brazen sin and the resultant contamination. Then the LORD makes an irrevocable, eternal covenant with humankind and all living things.[112] The LORD will never again destroy all living things *because* of the sinfulness of humankind. The reasons are twofold: the fundamental sinfulness of humankind and the pleasing sacrifice of one righteous man Noah.[113] The LORD will deal with humankind more leniently, so as not to destroy all living things.[114]

A similar pattern is discerned in Isa 54. As before the flood, all the nations are corrupt and devoid of justice and righteousness. Even the elect nation Israel is corrupt (48:8). LORD judges Israel and the nations with extreme severity, as he did with the flood. The LORD cleanses his people and the nations (within the bounds of the Noahic covenant). But the abiding truth that "the imagination of human hearts is evil from their youth"

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[110] The nations will be blessed through Zion (Isa 55:5; 56:3, 6, 7).

[111] Westermann 1969: 274.

[112] Gowan's discussion is helpful here (1994: 221). The flood was God's way of destroying sin and sinners and "starting over" with one righteous man. However, destruction was ultimately *not* "God's way of bringing about the cure for human sin." God's generalisation about the sinful state of humankind before the flood stands true even *after* the flood. After the flood, God only reminds himself of the sad fact that "the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth" (Gen 8:21). Human sinfulness is spoken of as an ongoing problem which will not be cured by massive destruction. God will have to deal with sin in some other way.

[113] Spieckermann 2000: 323. As Spieckermann would insist, divine grace of course eclipses both human factors for divine decision (the sinfulness of human or the righteousness of Noah). My point is rather that human reasons do play a role in moving God to act.

[114] Krašovec comments, "existential incompleteness is a decisive reason for God's forbearance towards humankind" (1999: 40).

(Gen 8:20-21) still stands true in Isaiah before and after the judgment. Solely based on divine goodness expressed in and through the righteous Servant's life as the אָשָׁם the LORD makes an everlasting, universal covenant of peace and love. One could say that the covenant mentioned in Isaiah takes the Noahic covenant to a higher level, as I will show.

What stands out as unique in Isaiah is the fact that the righteous Servant's life as the אָשָׁם is the decisive factor in ushering in a new era of everlasting love and peace to the world. However, Hermann Spieckermann insists, "As Noah's covenant is surpassed by the firm promise of merciful love, so the Servant's intercession is implicitly rejected by God's salvatory covenant. There are no mediators between God and Israel, either in the field of love or in that of sin."[115] I agree with Spieckermann that ultimately there is no mediator other than God himself. But God himself is in fact the mediator in this case because God is working through the Servant. Accordingly, the Servant's intercession is explicitly appointed and accepted by the LORD.[116] In the Servant's intercession is the ultimate expression of God's own intercession for Israel and the world.

The Servant's suffering is a necessary part of the LORD's freedom and decision to grant an everlasting covenant. Because the Servant suffered in place of the rebellious, the LORD will never rebuke Zion again (54:9). Because the Servant was punished, Zion will have an unfailing love and everlasting covenant of peace. As such, the Servant is truly "the covenant to the people" (לִבְרִית עָם, 42:6; 49:8), "the light to the nations" (לְאוֹר גּוֹיִם, 42:6; 49:6), and "[the LORD's] salvation to the ends of the earth" (יְשׁוּעָתִי עַד־קְצֵה הָאָרֶץ, 49:6).

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[115] Spieckermann 2000: 323.

[116] More specifically, our discussion of Isa 53 above has shown that: (1) the Servant is someone who "belongs to the identity of the unique God," the "arm of the LORD" revealed, (2) the LORD himself willed the Servant's intercession (Isa 53:10, etc.), and (3) the LORD explicitly exalted the Servant to the highest place after his suffering (that is an unmistakable sign of approval!).

The literary and theological relationship between the Servant Song and Isa 54, which I have already emphasized, is important for understanding the unity and harmony of divine justice and mercy, to which I now turn.

4.2.2. Severe Punishment Meted Out

The new era described in Isa 54, ushered in by the Suffering Servant, stands in a stark contrast to the era of exile. For scholars like Brueggemann, the contrast is so strong and the gap between the two eras so wide that they are perceived as representing two opposite, irreconcilable characteristics of God, expressed in extremes.[117] Thus, in one of his interpretations of Isa 54:7-10, Brueggemann paints a picture of a God whose patience and faithfulness run out at the time of the exile.[118] During the time of punishment, God has no self-control, and his acts of punishment (or "violent love") know no justice or righteousness. Only after the LORD's fury is spent does God reluctantly come back into proper covenant relationship with Israel. Such an interpretation rests on and supports Brueggemann's overall argument that God has a problematic character, in which mercy and judgment or faithfulness and sovereignty are contradictory and irreconcilable.

To be sure, Isa 54 has many terms and expressions that acknowledge the past harsh treatment of Zion. These terms and expression occur either in descriptive statements or in *declarations of the reversal of the past judgment*. They are: "O barren one, you did not bear" (עֲקָרָה לֹא יָלָדָה), "did not give birth" (לֹא־חָלָה), and "desolate one" (שׁוֹמֵמָה) in v.1; "fear" (תִּירְאִי), "be ashamed" (תֵּבוֹשִׁי), "be humiliated" (תִּכָּלְמִי), "embarrassed" (תַּחְפִּירִי), "shame of your youth" (בֹּשֶׁת עֲלוּמַיִךְ), and "reproach of your widowhood" (וְחֶרְפַּת אַלְמְנוּתַיִךְ) in v.4; "forsaken and grieved in spirit," (עֲזוּבָה וַעֲצוּבַת רוּחַ)

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[117] Brueggemann, 1997: 225.

[118] Brueggemann's alternate argument is that God suffers with Israel, and his love for Israel is intensified through suffering. In addition, through suffering the LORD finds love that he never had before, which now enables him to reconcile Israel to himself. The processes of love growing, deepening, and discovered through suffering certainly is present in human relationships, but the text does not necessarily suggest that this process is true of God's love. Rather, as I have shown, the LORD suffers for and with his people because of the perfect and enduring love he always has for his people, and through that suffering the LORD reconciles his people (Ex 34:6-7; Num 14:18, and now in Isa 53-54).

and "rejected" (תְּמָאֵס) in v.6; "for a brief moment I have left you" (בְּרֶגַע קָטֹן עֲזַבְתִּיךְ) in v.7; "in a flood of anger, I hid my face briefly from you" (בְּשֶׁצֶף קֶצֶף הִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי רֶגַע מִמֵּךְ) in v.8; "be angry with you" (מִקְצֹף עָלַיִךְ) and "rebuke you" (וּמִגְעַר־בָּךְ) in v.9; "my steadfast covenant love will depart from you" (וְחַסְדִּי מֵאִתֵּךְ יָמוּשׁ) and "my covenant peace will be shaken" (וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי תָּמוּט) in v.10; and "afflicted" (עֲנִיָּה), "lashed by storms" (סֹעֲרָה), and "not comforted" (לֹא נֻחָמָה) in verse11.

Although these terms are used with a negative particle to emphasize their reversal, they have the effect of emphasising the severity of the past punishment that the LORD meted out to Israel. In the face of the terms that point to the LORD's past anger, rejection, affliction, rebuke, and scorn, it does appear quite impossible to affirm the constancy of divine character in terms of faithfulness and mercy or the compatibility between divine mercy and justice. But, the following considerations will show some harmony between divine mercy and judgment, between solidarity and sovereignty, and between forgiveness and punishment.

4.2.3. God's Righteous Punishment of His Covenant People

Characteristic of Brueggemann's interpretation of the Israel-God covenant relationship is the absence of the role of Israel's sin. But God's exile of Israel must be interpreted in view of Israel's sin in the context of the covenant relationship with God.

The proper theological context in which to understand the exile is that of the covenant blessings and curses detailed in Lev 26 and Deut 28. Once God has displayed his glory to Israel and a covenant is made between them, God expects holiness from Israel. God expected Israel to fear, obey, and love God and live righteously in community. As Israel is expected to do its part, God will do his part. God's covenant commitment to Israel includes not only blessings if Israel demonstrates obedience, but also curses if Israel turns to rebellion and apostasy. The texts of Lev 26 (v.30-39) and Deut 28 (v.49ff and 64ff; cf.

4:27ff) speak of exile as the ultimate punishment or curse that would come after many cycles of warning, obduracy, punishment, and restoration. Indeed, before the exile, God amply warns Israel of the coming ultimate judgment.

Deutero-Isaiah attests that for centuries Israel lived a national life characterised by unfaithfulness, rebellion, and stubbornness. The prophet confesses Israel's sinful state, "We all like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way" (53:6). God laments that "the people are radically unfaithful" from the very start of the nation's history.[119] "Hitherto your ears were not opened. Well I know how treacherous you are, that from birth you were called a rebel" (48:8).[120] Israel's severe sin accounted for the extremely severe punishment of the exile.

Ex 34:6-7 and its echoes testify to the increasing severity of the punishments that the Israelites received throughout their history. The golden calf incident provides a paradigmatic example of Israel's sin—"Israel's fall story"—which is re-enacted by Israel in later history. But there is a difference between the nation's first offense and the nation's ongoing persistence in corruption and rebellion. The difference lies not in the gravity of sins, but in the accumulation of unrepentant and persistent sins. Consistent with the warnings of Lev 26 and Deut 28, Israel's *persistence* in rebellion and apostasy similar to the sin of the golden calf brought upon Israel increasing punishments. Instead of repenting in light of God's gracious response to the sin of the golden calf, Israel manifested a repeated pattern of rebellion that, by the time of the exile, had irreversibly defiled the whole people and the entire land of Israel. This deep entrenchment in sin called for the severest punishment, more severe than the punishment demanded by the golden calf. This means that at any time in Israel's history "there is no basis for doubting the divine justice, even in a moment of supreme national desolation."[121] The LORD's punishments are

[119] See Krašovec 1999: 490.
[120] Childs' translation (2001:368).
[121] Krašovec 1999: 490.

measured and proportionate, even as the LORD says in Isa 28:17, "I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line." In the exile, what the LORD meted out to Israel was just. In judgment, God consistently acts within the bounds of "contractual" justice; God does not overstep the bounds of justice and treat Israel more harshly than she deserves.

In fact, although divine punishment is augmented in keeping with the augmenting of Israel's sin, divine justice is still tempered by divine mercy. God's proportionate manner of dealing with Israel stands within the general framework of divine mercy. In the next subsection, I will discuss how God in his freedom and mercy often treats Israel less harshly than she deserves. This is not contradictory to justice, because in such cases, God himself (or God's Servant) bears Israel's sin and its consequences.[122]

4.2.4. The Merciful Justice of God

The divine punishment alluded to in Isa 54 is not only just, but also merciful. The reality of God's mercy in the context of God's just punishment of Israel in the exile is seen in many ways.

(1) Divine patience is displayed as the LORD waits for centuries before exiling Israel. The LORD gave many cycles of warning and limited punishment to chastise Israel and to deter Israel from further sin. But Israel took advantage of divine patience and lived in complacency and obduracy for several centuries. The repeated warnings underscore Israel's stubbornness on the one hand and divine righteousness and mercy on the other. Therefore there is no room for doubting divine mercy. Even the severest of divine judgment is not capricious but is tempered by centuries of long-suffering with Israel and covenant love for Israel.

(2) The exile itself fell short of the total destruction that Israel's centuries of apostasy and injustice called for. The LORD did not cut off Israel. Even when the LORD was

[122] See Brueggemann 1992: Chapters 1 and 2 for a related discussion and for his failure to show how the biblical text itself integrates contractual justice and gracious mercy.

said to be "pouring out on them his burning anger, the violence of battle" (42:25), the LORD exercised his patience and mercy and spared Israel from utter destruction. Thus, the LORD says:

> **Isa 48:9** For the sake of my name I am slow to anger;
> for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off.

In divine patience and mercy, God restrains his anger and punishment so as not to destroy Israel. It is important to note that according to this verse the reason the LORD is merciful to Israel is for his name's sake. As indicated in earlier chapters, the praise of his name is related to his reputation among the nations, which in turn is directly related to the salvation of the nations through the LORD.[123] By preserving Israel and displaying his mercy in justice, the nations come to know and worship the compassionate and merciful God of Israel.

(3) The nature of the LORD's commitment to Israel in Ex 34 (reflected also in Num 14) provides the proper theological context for understanding divine mercy in the exile. On Sinai the LORD decided not to utterly destroy Israel, but to renew and continue his covenant relationship with Israel despite Israel's extreme rebellion and capriciousness (Ex 34:6-10).[124] Accordingly, even in the context of announcing covenant curses, the LORD says, "I will not reject [the Israelites] or abhor them so as to consume them, breaking my covenant with them, for I am the LORD their God" (Lev 26:44). The fact that the LORD preserves Israel testifies to the LORD's faithfulness to his covenant with Israel. An accusation of unfaithfulness would be justifiable only if the LORD had completely destroyed Israel. But, that, the LORD has not done.

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[123] Again, this stands against Brueggemann's interpretation of texts about God's concern for his name, reputation or glory among the nations. Brueggemann sees these texts as almost exclusively about God's self-centred self-regard (see, for example, his comments on God's "glory"; 1997: 283ff).

[124] This decision is reflective of the parallel once-for-all decision in Gen 8-9 to deal leniently with humanity because of the undeniable human inclination towards sin. See the relevant comments of Fretheim 1998: 32f.

4.2.5. God as Holy, the Everlasting Consuming Fire

The compatibility between divine mercy and justice can also be seen in the fact that mercy and justice proceed out of God's holy character. In the book of Isaiah, the LORD is frequently referred to as "the Holy One of Israel."[125] Divine "love" and "justice" are fundamental expressions of God's intrinsic holiness. Thus, the holy God calls Israel to become holy by embracing the holy God, living by his holy ways, and taking on his holy character. Where there is unholiness, the holy God manifests himself as "a consuming fire" (כְּאֵשׁ אֹכֶלֶת).[126]

That a holy God who is a consuming fire dwells among Israel and that Israel has embraced this God have certain consequences. (1) On the one hand, God's righteousness, justice, and salvation can be established through Israel among the nations. Israel can be an instrument of divine justice, purification, and restoration. As God's instrument of holiness, Israel itself can become, in a derivative way, like a consuming fire that can purify and cleanse the nations. This is a way Israel can fulfil its destiny of being a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Ex 19:6). The conquest and habitation of the promised land can be seen as the beginning of such a mission.

(2) On the other hand, when Israel falls into apostasy and injustice and stands in opposition to the Holy One of Israel, Israel can expect (and does receive) certain cleansing actions from the LORD. The LORD reveals his name to be "jealous" (קַנָּא, Ex 34:14; cf. Deut 4:24: "the LORD your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God"). A jealous God is one who is committed to the holiness of his people among whom he dwells. Thus, when there is persistent apostasy, corruption, rebellion, and obduracy, God who is holy consumes both sin and sinners.

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[125] The phrase "the Holy One of Israel" occurs about twenty-six times in Isaiah, twelve times in chapters 1-39 and fourteen times in 40-66. It occurs only six times in the Old Testament outside of Isaiah. This, as an aside, is significant evidence for the literary unity of the book of Isaiah.

[126] Ex 24:17; Deut 4:24; 9:3; Isa 9:18; 10:17; Lam 2:3f.

In Isaiah, various anthropomorphisms are used to describe the LORD who lets his holy "fire" (אֵשׁ) burn against all that is unholy. The LORD is said to be coming in "burning anger . . . his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is like a consuming fire" (בֹּעֵר אַפּוֹ . . . שְׂפָתָיו מָלְאוּ זַעַם וּלְשׁוֹנוֹ כְּאֵשׁ אֹכֶלֶת, 30:27). Against the obstinate apostate, the LORD's "arm" (זְרוֹעַ) comes down "with raging anger and the flames of a consuming fire" (בְּזַעַף אַף וְלַהַב אֵשׁ אוֹכֵלָה, 30:30). The LORD's fiery wrath comes not only against the nations but also against "the sinners in Zion" (33:14). A question is raised in 33:14: "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?" A sobering answer is offered: "Those who walk righteously and speak what is right, who reject gain from extortion and keeps their hand from accepting bribes, and who stop their ears from hearing of bloodshed and shut their eyes from looking at evil"(33:15). The answer given is not only sobering, calling Israel to repentance, but also hope-inspiring. The verse indicates that it is possible to dwell with "the consuming fire," the "everlasting burning." But it takes nothing less than a full embrace of "the consuming fire" in the sense of not tolerating iniquity, rebellion, and sin. Only those who are holy can live with the One who is holy.

In the theology evident in Isa 54 and its context, the covenant relationship with God is not to be taken for granted, for it comes with a call and a responsibility to be holy. The LORD is not someone to be treated lightly. The LORD is one who unleashes "anger" (קֶצֶף, v.8,9). The LORD is the consuming fire who "rebukes" (גָּעַר, v.9) his people. In Ex 33:3ff, the LORD wishes to withdraw his presence from the Israelites so as not to consume them in his burning anger (see Chapter 2). In contrast, in Isaiah, the LORD is in their midst, letting his consuming fire burn against them until all sin is atoned for (see Isa 12:6). Divine "anger," "rebuke," and "fire" are manifestations of the LORD's abandonment of (עָזַב, 54:7) Israel to violent war and exile. Thus the prophet laments:

> **Isa 42:24-25** Who handed Jacob over to the plunderer and Israel to the robbers? Was it not the LORD against whom we have sinned?

For they did not walk in his ways and they did not obey his law.
So he poured out on them his burning anger, the violence of battle.
It set them on fire all around, yet they did not understand;
it burned them, but they did not take it to heart.

As Knight says: "God had made [Israel] taste the death of separation from him, *for a brief moment*. This was essential if Israel was ever to learn that God Almighty was in earnest about her election."[127] Even as 42:25 implies, divine punishment of Israel is to bring understanding and repentance to them (though the verse also indicates that Israel did not get the point.).

In contrast to my interpretation, Brueggemann claimed that God's judgment of Israel in exile "is not for instruction or chastening or improvement. It is simply judgment of a sovereign who will not be mocked."[128] But his view is questionable. In the covenant blessings and curses in Deut 28:49-50 and Lev 26, the LORD makes explicit the disciplinary and corrective nature of divine judgment. As John N. Oswalt puts it, divine judgment "is not a matter of a raging tyrant who demands violence on someone to satisfy his fury."[129] Divine judgment, however severe, has a righteous, just, and redeeming purpose. Thus, it purifies, teaches, and directs sinners in the way they should go.

Isa 48:10, 17 See, I have refined you, but not like silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction . . .
17 "I am the LORD your God who teaches you for your benefit,
who leads you in the way you should go."

This passage speaks expressly of the divine punishment of the exile in terms of God's refinement or purification.[130] The LORD's patient disciplinary dealing with Israel is for the purpose of teaching Israel what is best for Israel and directing Israel in the way Israel should go.

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[127] Knight 1965: 248.
[128] Brueggemann 1997: 439.
[129] Oswalt 1998: 388.
[130] Accordingly, Isa 27:9 (לָכֵן בְּזֹאת יְכֻפַּר עֲוֹן־יַעֲקֹב וְזֶה כָּל־פְּרִי הָסֵר חַטָּאתוֹ) speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the exile of the people as the consequence of the divine act of purification or removal of sins from the nation that has been contaminated by centuries of rebellion and brazen sins.

The LORD's severe punishment is also restorative. After a severe testing and refining, the LORD restores Israel. In fact, severe testing and cleansing are part of the LORD's restoring work. "I have swept away your rebellions like a cloud, your sins like the midst. Return to me, for I have redeemed you" (44:22). In view of Israel's extreme sin, what is striking is not the fact that the LORD briefly exiles Israel but that the LORD brings Israel back at all.

In sum, being God's treasured people is inextricably associated with the pursuit of holiness, and this in turn is inextricably related to Israel's identity and mission.[131] Thus when and where Israel fails to be holy, the LORD intervenes and disciplines. Divine punishment, such as exile, is to be understood as a means of chastisement and purification. That the LORD will keep Israel as his people means that the LORD is committed to purifying Israel. This is ultimately good news to Israel, though very painful. The fact of election comes with privileges and responsibilities, bringing either blessings or curses depending on how the elect responds to the privileges and responsibilities given.[132] When being corrected (through punishment), it may feel nothing like mercy or compassion in human experience. But human feelings cannot alter the biblical witness that divine jealousy is part of God's holy love for his people. Both divine blessings and curses flow out of God's holy character. The Holy One of Israel who dwells in the midst of his people seeks to purify and establish a treasured holy people of God.[133]

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[131] Sarna 1991: 104.

[132] In Deuteronomy, the LORD's preference and desire for Israel to choose holiness and life over against sin and death is clearly made (Deut 30:19-20). As Brueggemann correctly says of God's holiness, "If Israel will be with Yahweh, Israel must be like Yahweh; that is, with Yahweh on Yahweh's demanding terms" (1997: 290).

[133] The LORD deals with the nations on the same basis as Israel. The LORD deals with them with his compassion and grace shown in mercy. This means all of the divine attributes: patience, covenant love (Noahic and Isa 54) and faithfulness, divine sin-bearing, and justice, are equally applicable to the nations to the end of producing righteous servants of God. See my mention of nations throughout the chapter.

5. Concluding Remarks

The echoed terms show the similarity between the vicarious atoning work of the LORD in Exodus and the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. The shared vocabulary of Ex 34:6-7 and Isa 53-54 and the context of Isa 53-54 show that the Servant is the "arm" of the LORD revealed to Israel and to the nations for the salvation of the world. Accordingly, the Exodus and Isaiah passages have important shared theological elements.

Both in Exodus and in Isaiah, the LORD or the Servant provides the forgiveness of sins. In both, the LORD has the prerogative not to punish the Israelites (and the nations) as their sins deserve. In both the LORD exercises divine freedom to remove human sin and punishment and offer reconciliation (through God's own sin-bearing or the Servant's sin-bearing). The vicarious atoning work of the LORD (by himself or through the Servant) tempers divine justice. In both, the LORD extends compassion and grace after the chastisement of the sinner and God's own provision of atonement.

In both Ex 32-34 and Isa 53-54, a contrast is made between the brief and limited nature of divine wrath and the enduring nature of compassion and kindness. Both passages demonstrate that God will not altogether acquit the guilty but will ultimately punish the sinner. In Isaiah, the LORD severely punishes both Israel and the nations according to the measure of their sins. The LORD does this to the end of establishing a righteous people of God.

More specifically, in Isa 53-54, in the humiliation, suffering, exaltation, and ministry of the Servant, the nature of divine sovereignty is shown to be self-giving. The LORD's sovereign power and freedom to remove human sin and extend everlasting covenant love are shown through the Servant's voluntary suffering. The voluntary humiliation and vicarious suffering of the Servant, the exaltation of the Servant, and the Servant's justification of the rebellious are the expressions of the compatibility of punishment and mercy, servanthood and sovereignty. Divine punishment of the Servant flows out of divine

mercy for sinners, and divine servanthood (through the Servant) flows out of divine sovereignty.

The above continuities between Ex 32-34 and Isa 53-54 do not imply that there are not significant differences between them on the matter of the LORD's work of sin-bearing and reconciliation. The following are some of distinct contributions Isa 53 makes toward an understanding of divine mercy and judgment. (1) I have noted that Exodus presents God as directly bearing human sin, whereas Isa 53 speaks of a distinguishable agent doing God's work of sin-bearing. The larger literary context of Isa 53 also portrays the LORD as a servant who labours under Israel's sin in order to remove it from Israel (Isa 43:24). (2) The LORD will extend divine mercy and compassion not only to Israel, but also to all nations. Redemption and restoration are extended to all nations through Zion. Isaiah 53-54 makes it explicit that the LORD deals with the nations in the way the LORD deals with Israel, that is, according to the revealed divine character. (3) The Servant Song presents sin-bearing as vicarious in nature, which does not exclude appropriate measure of punishment of the sinner. (4) While suffering resulting from the act of sin-bearing is hinted at in Ex 32-34, suffering is made the explicit, dominant aspect of sin-bearing in Isa 53. (5) Divine mercy and judgment, atonement and punishment are demonstrated simultaneously in the punishment of the Servant. In the Servant, divine mercy and judgment "kiss" each other and mercy (for the sinner) is affirmed by way of judgment (of the Servant). In Exodus, however, punishment of sin is explicitly meted out to sinners before the LORD reveals himself to be the sin and punishment bearer. (6) Based on the Servant's vicarious suffering, an unconditional, unilateral everlasting covenant of peace and love is extended to the world. In Exodus, however, the covenant that is re-established is contractual (Ex 34:10ff).

The similarities reinforce the compatibility between divine mercy and justice. The differences further illuminate the different ways in which the harmony between divine mercy and justice can be expressed in different situations in Israel's history.

Chapter 5:

The Echoes In

Nahum 1:3

2 אֵל קַנּוֹא וְנֹקֵם יְהוָה נֹקֵם יְהוָה וּבַעַל חֵמָה נֹקֵם
יְהוָה לְצָרָיו וְנוֹטֵר הוּא לְאוֹיְבָיו׃
3 יְהוָה אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וּגְדָל־כֹּחַ וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה

[2] ***The Lord***[1] ***is a jealous***[2] and ***avenging*** God.
The Lord is an ***avenging***[3] and wrathful lord.[4]
The Lord is ***avenging*** against his adversaries.
He keeps watch[5] on his enemies.
[3] The Lord is **slow to anger**[6] and great[7] in power,
And **does not altogether clear the guilty**.[8]

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[1] As in earlier chapters, words in regular boldface type represent quotations, while words in italics boldface type represent allusions. In the past many scholars have freely emended the text mainly to "reconstruct" the supposed acrostic psalm in Chapter 1 (See below for those who emend the text for this very purpose). Against this view, Cathcart and others have argued for the accuracy of the Hebrew text (see below). This paper affirms the latter view, and abstains from unnecessary emendations of the text.

[2] אֵל קַנּוֹא —"jealous God"; LXX has ζηλωτὴς; V *æmulatorem*. This combination also appears in Ex 20:5; 34:14; Deut 4:24; 6:15.

[3] נֹקֵם יְהוָה is omitted in LXX probably through haplography.

[4] בַּעַל חֵמָה—LXX has μετὰ θυμοῦ. בַּעַל is omitted in LXX. בַּעַל חֵמָה is variously rendered by translators: "wrathful" (RSV); "filled with wrath" (JMP Smith 1912: 289); "lord of rage" (Nogalski 1993: 38). Some postulate an unnecessary connection to Canaanite deity Baal, e.g., Cathcart 1973: 40; Roberts 1991: 43. בַּעַל and אֵל as alternative, reconcilable designations of God of Israel, see Coggins 1985: 21; Albright 1968: 199-200. Here בַּעַל is taken as "master" or "lord" of something that characterizes one's manner, similar to בַּעַל אַף "angry man" in Pr 22:24 (29:22).

[5] LXX has καὶ ἐξαίρων; V has *et irascens*. The term ἐξαίρων is nowhere else used to render נוֹטֵר but the Aramaic נטל ("be lifted up") as in Dan 7:4 (Smith, Ward, and Bewer 1912: 297). The main lexical meaning of the root נטר is "to keep watch" or "to guard" (Song of Songs 1:6; 8:11,12). Aramaic נטר in Daniel 7:28 also has the basic same meaning, "to keep." In its other uses (Lev 19:8; Pss 94:1; 103:9; Jer 3:5; 3:12), נטר has the basic meaning of "to keep watch" but "with the idea of anger being supplied by the context" (Patterson 1991: 27). See below for further discussion on my translation.

[6] LXX, V, and S translate 3ab literally, paraphrased by Tg. NEB omits translations for 3ab as a copyist's gloss. Verse 3ab conveys divine patience and justice tempered by mercy, which presents a contradiction to NEB's (deficient) translation of נוֹטֵר as "quick to anger," hence calling for the omission of 3ab. Blenkinsopp (1983: 171, note 25) also sees 1:3a as an "explanatory gloss" that contradicts the preceding verse. It is unlikely, however, that a copyist added what would be a glaring contradiction.

[7] Reading with a ketib וּגְדוֹל for the qeré וּגְדָל.

[8] See the translation notes for Ex 34:6f in Chapter 2. "By no means clear the guilty" (by the majority of commentators); and "ne laissera pas le coupable impuni" (Bic 1968: 75). Several issues remain regarding the text of Nah 1:2-3 and its translation; they are discussed in the exegesis section.

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of the Chapter and Its Argument

The opening verses of Nahum quote from Ex 34:6-7, but the nature and function of the echo in Nah 1:3 have not been adequately studied or explained. Furthermore, there is a lack of cogent theological study on the nature of God as *both* avenging and merciful in Nahum's echo of the formula (Ex 34:6-7). The comments by Walter Brueggemann on the echo in Nah 1:3 are good illustrations of these inadequacies. His tenuous conclusions and the general gap in the study of the echo of the formula in Nah 1:3 invite a new scholarly response.

This chapter will unfold as follows: In the remainder of the introduction, I will state the theological problems raised by Brueggemann's treatment of the echo in Nah 1:3. In section 2, I will briefly discuss the canonical, historical, and literary context of the echo in Nahum. In section 3, I will categorise and define the scope of the echo in Nahum, critically examining those terms that have been incorrectly taken as echoes. In section 4, I will turn to an exegetical discussion of the echo in Nah 1:3 itself. Finally, in section 5, I will conclude the chapter with a brief summary of my main points.

1.2. The Problems of the Echo in Nahum

There are two main problems as regards the echo in Nah 1:3. The first has to do with the apparent non-contextual use of the echo. The second is an inadequate theological reading of the echo due to a dualistic and polarised understanding of God's mercy and vengeance.

1.2.1. Non-Contextual Use of the Echo in Nahum

The difficulties associated with Nahum's echo have to do with the lack of an adequate contextual and theological reading. I will focus mainly on how Brueggemann and other scholars treat the phrase "slow to anger" (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם) in Nah 1:3.

One of the main problems regarding אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם in Nah 1:3 is that the phrase does not appear to fit its new context in Nahum, though it fits easily in Ex 32-34. How can Nahum say that "the LORD is slow to anger" in the midst of announcing that the LORD's wrath is about to be poured out? The immediately surrounding phrases also place strong emphasis on the LORD's avenging wrath. In Ex 34:6, by contrast, the phrase is surrounded by terms of God's compassion, mercy, and steadfast love.

Commentators have proposed various solutions to this problem. In his *Theology of the Old Testament*, Brueggemann offers an interpretation of Nah 1:2-3 that proceeds from his view of the portrayal of God in Ex 34:6-7. As can be seen by his comments on that passage (see Chapter 2), Brueggemann believes that God's judgment and mercy are in profound contradiction to each other (227). "Slow to anger" belongs to the "positive" side of this irreconcilable contradiction. This implies that "slow to anger" does not fit well in Nahum, which Brueggemann regards as being exclusively about judgment. For him, the idiomatic phrase "plays no role in Nahum's utterance, or serves only to indicate that Yahweh's 'slowness to anger' is now exhausted and does not extend to Assyria" (270).

Michael Fishbane (1985) is in agreement with Brueggemann insofar as he states that Nahum "preaches wrath and doom, *with no trace of mitigating divine mercy*" (italics mine).[9] Fishbane, however, has a different solution to the problem of the presence of "slow to anger" in this seemingly inappropriate context. He argues that what were terms of compassion in Ex 34:6-7 are transformed into terms of war in Nah 1:3. Fishbane (1977) asserts that "'*assuages* anger' (taking אֶרֶךְ to be like the stem used in, e.g., Jer 30:17) becomes '*long* of anger'" in Nahum's reuse of the expression.[10] After suggesting several other transformations of terms in Nah 1, Fishbane (1985) says the following about the echo in Nahum:

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[9] Fishbane 1985: 347; my italics.
[10] Fishbane 1977: 280-281.

> [T]he prophet fulminates against the Assyrian army and envisages the imminence of divine vengeance portrayed through a series of *vengefully reapplied* references and allusions to Exod. 34:6-7. The older *traditum* is thus transformed by a *traditio*, which preaches wrath and doom, *with no trace of mitigating divine mercy* (italics mine, except for the Latin terms).[11]

For Fishbane, such a vengeful usage of the formula "is, to a degree, an exception; for it is the theme of divine mercy that is generally stressed in inner-biblical reuses of the divine attributes formulary, particularly liturgical petitions—be these from the Pentateuch (like Num. 14: 17-19) or from the Psalter."[12] Brueggemann would concur with this observation.[13]

Both Brueggemann and Fishbane are in agreement that there is no trace of mercy in Nahum's use of the echo[14] and that Nahum thus represents an exceptional case among the echoes of the formula. They are in effect saying that the idiom "slow to anger" is used non-contextually in Nahum. Such an affirmation reflects a failure to appreciate the continuity of the meaning and function of the idiom in Ex 34:6-7 and in Nahum. Indeed, the unity between judgment and mercy in Nah 1:2-3 is decisively confirmed by the use of the phrase "slow to anger"[15] in relation to God's wrath.[16]

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[11] Fishbane 1985: 347.

[12] Fishbane 1985: 347.

[13] As such, Brueggemann views Nah 1:3 as unique among the echoes of Ex 34:6-7 in the Hebrew Bible—the exception that proves the rule. See Brueggemann 1997: 270.

[14] Similarly for Roberts (1991: 50), the phrase וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה completes Nahum's portrayal of "an enraged God of harsh vengeance," and there is no hint of God's mercy in Nahum. Also Sweeney (2000: 428) rightly comments that Ex 34:6-7 "serves as a statement of YHWH's mercy and justice." Yet, of Nahum's echoes he says, "The Nahum version of this statement is clearly shortened, and represents an attempt to interpret the statement in relation to the rhetorical needs of Nahum, i.e. it emphasizes YHWH's power and capacity for justice against an enemy but it does not include the statements concerning YHWH's mercy."

[15] The Hebrew idiom אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם can be translated as "slow to anger," "longsuffering" or "patient" (Ex 34:6; Num 14:18; Ps 86:15). The three translations are complementary, each drawing out slightly different aspects of the Hebrew idiom. For a detailed discussion on this idiom, see Chapter 2. Also, see below for its use in Nah 1:3.

[16] Brueggemann regards the other echoed phrase "not altogether clearing the guilty" (נַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה) as fitting the context in Nah 1:3, but not in Ex 34:6-7. Thus, the situation is thought to be the reverse of the situation of אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם. The attribute of God "by no means clearing the guilty" is thought to be foreign to and inconsistent with the bulk of the formula (Ex 34:6-7a) and its context's emphasis on forgiveness. This attribute of God is thought to better serve Nahum's vengeful purpose. Brueggemann says, "when Israel wishes to issue a verbal assault against Assyria, the psalm in Nah 1:2-

1.2.2. The Theological Problem

There is a theological problem closely related to the non-contextual reading of "slow to anger" and the related misinterpretation of the expression וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה. Brueggemann in particular presents a view of God's character as bipolar and unpredictable; "we *cannot know* ahead of time which *extreme* of Yahweh may be disclosed" (281; italics mine). In Nahum, the LORD is seen to be clearly at the punitive end of the two extremes.

Accordingly, Brueggemann says that the poetry of Nahum presents Yahweh as a warrior "freighted with violence" who is "prepared to do massive, unrestrained violence against Nineveh" (274). Brueggemann entertains the thought that "this may indeed be a just response for the way in which the Assyrians have maltreated Israel over a long period" (274). However, Brueggemann dismisses any possibility of divine justice in the punishment of Nineveh:

> The rhetoric itself, however, suggests a complete lack of restraint in which there is something like delight (Yahweh's delight? Israel's delight?) in the anticipation of an orgy of death, blood, and violence (cf. 2:9-10; 3:5-7). Israel's resentment is fully taken over, embraced, and acted on by Yahweh (274-5).

In his typical dialectical interpretative mode, Brueggemann further offers a statement that seems to acknowledge the compatibility of divine mercy and justice and the purposeful nature of divine vengeance:[17]

> Much of this fierceness on the part of Yahweh (though not all of it) is in the service of Israel's special status and privilege under the rule of Yahweh, so that the testimony itself is rather uncritical. Yahweh's fierceness and violence cannot be separated from its positive effect on Israel, and therefore can often be construed as a negative counterpart to Yahweh's intense loyalty to Israel. For example, in the extreme expression of fury from Nahum 1, the counterpoint in the text concerns

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8 appeals precisely to the second half of the formula, 'by no means clears the guilty'" (270). For Brueggemann, this phrase speaks of "the harsh sovereignty of Yahweh, who will move massively and destructively against Nineveh" (270).

[17] Brueggemann does this while commenting on various passages (including Nahum) that deal with Yahweh's fierce vengeance on Israel's enemy nations.

> the well-being of Israel, made possible by the destruction of Assyria . . . On the whole these texts assert that Yahweh's enormous power is in the service of a sovereignty marked by both justice and fidelity (276).

Brueggemann makes this statement only to contradict any interpretation that renders divine acts of vengeance just and good. Brueggemann deconstructs any positive assessment previously given by his final negative evaluation of divine character and acts:

> But the ferocious rhetoric hinting at Yahweh's delight in rage suggests that not all is contained in Yahweh's graciousness and fidelity, nor even in Yahweh's reasoned sovereignty . . . Yahweh's governance is a good and essential factor in the well-being of Israel but, in my judgment, Yahweh's governance is not completely rationalized either in relation to Israel or in relation to a commitment to an ordered justice. Yahweh's power is characteristically linked to Yahweh's fidelity . . . but not always (276).

In sum, for Brueggemann, divine vengeance in Nahum is ultimately hardly an expression of "the legitimate governance of Yahweh" but displays an "excessive self-regard on the part of Yahweh" (280). Divine vengeance is not consistently tempered by compassion (or "other-regard"), nor is it in the service of justice, redemption, or restoration. Divine vengeance has "no other function" than to confirm "an unfettered show of self-assertion" (276). In Nahum, God is not trustworthy, righteous, or faithful in the usual senses of those terms.

In light of the above claims, it might seem difficult to defend my thesis that Nah 1:2-3 stands in a relationship of significant *continuity* to Ex 34:6-7. In fact, Nahum *omits* most of the terms from Ex 34:6-7 normally associated with mercy: "compassionate and gracious," "steadfast love and faithfulness," "maintaining steadfast love to thousands," and "forgiving sin, iniquity and transgression." Such an omission (whether intentional or not) no doubt has the effect of lessening the stress on mercy in Nah 1. In addition, Nah 1:2-3 and the book as a whole place a strong emphasis on divine judgment and punishment. Such an emphasis, to speak in quantitative terms, appears discordant with *most* of the phrases in Ex 34:6-7 and with

the *majority* of its echoes. In this very different setting in Nahum, then, one would expect "slow to anger" either to have a different meaning or to be discordant with the tenor of the passage as a whole.[18] It is therefore tempting to affirm what seems obvious and to discount what is difficult. But, once again, a careful analysis of the passage in its context will show that such conclusions are not sound. The task of the remainder of this chapter is to show that God's patient mercy and punishing judgment are compatible and integrated in Nahum just as in Ex 32-34, as well as the related intertextual assertion that Nah 1:2-3 is a faithful application of Ex 34:6-7.

2. The Nature and Extent of the Echoes in Nahum 1:2-3

There are two phrases in Nah 1:3 that together constitute a strong echo of Ex 34:6-7. They are אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם "slow to anger" and וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה " does not remit all punishment."[19] These phrases are quotations from Ex 34:6-7,[20] plainly meeting both the literary (verbal and syntactical) and thematic criteria for an echo.[21] These echo phrases will be the focus of our attention in the section 4.

In addition to these phrases, there are also several weak echoes in the passage. The term נֹקֵם "avenging" in Nah 1:2 is a thematic echo since it is a word that is similar in meaning (the main aspect of thematic similarity) of the term פֹּקֵד "visiting" or "avenging" that occurs in Ex 34:7. Contextual echoes in Nah 1 include

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[18] I have shown above that this was the case to a lesser extent in the difference between how God expressed his patience to Israel in the different occasions of Ex 32-34 and Num 14.

[19] Scholars generally agree that these are quotations from Ex 34:6-7. e.g., Scharbert 1957; Dentan 1963; Coggins and Re'emi 1985: 22; Sarna 1991: 262 (n.7); Brueggemann 1997; Spronk 1997: 36; Sweeney 2000: 428.

[20] Again, in calling these phrases "quotations" of Ex 34:6-7, I do not presuppose that Ex 34:6-7 must have been explicitly in the author's mind. I refer only to the fact that these words *exactly repeat* the same phrases used in Exodus, whatever the explanation. This leaves open other possibilities; another text (perhaps itself an echo of Ex 34:6-7) may have been the immediate source of the "repetition," or these phrases were a part of Israel's oral tradition at the time of Nahum.

[21] See my definition of an echo in Chapter 1, subsection 1.3.

חֵמָה "wrath" (v.2) and חֲרוֹן אַף "burning anger" (v.6; cf. חֲרוֹן אַף "burning anger," Ex 32:12), אֵל קַנּוֹא יְהוָה "the LORD is a jealous God" (v.2; cf. אֵל קַנָּא, Ex 34:14), and טוֹב יְהוָה "The LORD is good" (v.7; cf. כָּל־טוּבִי "all my goodness," Ex 33:19).

Besides these echoes, Fishbane claims that there are other expressions that allude to Ex 34:6-7:

> In this reuse of the "attribute-formula" (Exod. 34:6-7) in Nah. 1:2-3 terms of compassion are transformed into terms of war: "who maintains *(nōsēr) kindness*" becomes "who *rages* (*nôtēr*) against his *enemies*"; "*assuages* anger" (taking *'erek* to be like the stem used in, e.g., Jer 30:17) becomes "*long* of anger"; and "great in... *kindness*" becomes "mighty in *power*.[22]

But there are no reasons sufficient to hold this view. (1) Elsewhere Fishbane comments, "In this setting *nôtēr* 'rage,' in v.2 is a dialectical pun on *nōsēr* in the attribute formulary."[23] No further reason is given as to why one ought to regard נוֹטֵר as a "dialectical pun" on נֹצֵר. The term נוֹטֵר rhymes with נֹצֵר, but this is insufficient evidence to constitute a genuine literary correspondence between the two phrases. (2) As I will show below, the basic meaning of patience of אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם is supported by its context and, unlike what Fishbane claims, does include affirmations of divine mercy. (3) Fishbane does not give any explicit reasons for his suggestion that גְּדָל־כֹּחַ is a transformative reuse of רַב־חֶסֶד.[24] There are, however, ample arguments against his suggestion. There are many constructs throughout the Old

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[22] Fishbane 1977: 280-281. Roberts (1991: 50) has a similar view. He argues that "slow to anger" is usually expanded by וְרַב־חֶסֶד or וּגְדֹל־חֶסֶד (in Ex 34:6-7 and its other echoes), but in Nahum it is "replaced" by "great in power." For a somewhat different view, see Gunkel (1893: 223-244) who regards גְּדָל־כֹּחַ as a textual corruption. That said, Gunkel believes strongly that it *should* have been an echo. That is, he changes "great in strength" to "great in mercy" to restore what he deems as original text in Nahum. Although Gunkel and Fishbane have different ways of dealing with "mighty in power," they both in effect are agreeing that this phrase or its "original" is an echo of some kind of "great in kindness" from Ex 34:6.

[23] Fishbane 1985: 347; also Spronk 1997: 36, after Fishbane.

[24] The case of גְּדָל־כֹּחַ points in the direction that Fishbane's overstated estimations of the extent of the echo in Nah 1 is a result of his tendency to see *aggadah* or *midrash* in the passage (and throughout the Scriptures).

Testament that occur with the terms רַב or גָּדוֹל, ascribing to God his greatness in respect to many attributes. That God is "great in power" is a common idea in the Old Testament, so it is difficult to see why it must be interpreted as a specific transformation of another very common Old Testament idea (רַב־חֶסֶד).

My exegetical discussion (in section 4) will focus on the strong echo in Nah 1:3 as identified above. Weak echoes will be briefly discussed in relation to the strong echo, as they illuminate the meaning and function of the strong echo.

3. The Literary and Theological Context of the Echo in Nahum 1:3

Since the argument of this chapter depends in part on being sensitive to the context of the echo in Nah 1:3, I will now make some relevant comments on its historical, literary, and theological context. I will begin with the larger literary context of the book of the Twelve. I will then treat the book of Nahum as providing a narrower context for the echo in Nah 1:3. I will include a discussion of the psalm or hymn in Nah 1:2-10 as the most immediate context of Nahum's echo.

3.1. Literary and Theological Context of the Book of the Twelve

Reading the book of the Twelve (hereafter "the Twelve") as a literary unit has significant ramifications for the interpretation of the portrayal of God in the book of Nahum. First of all, the Twelve begins with words about God's judgment and restoration of Israel (Hosea 1-3), and this is significant for the interpretation of the Twelve. Childs observes that Hosea 1-3 "provides the exegetical key in the framework from which the entire book [of Hosea] is to be read."[25] In addition, Paul R. House states that "[Hosea] sets the stage for the Twelve's characterization of the LORD."[26] An implication of their observation is that the prophetic marriage between Hosea and Gomer provides a canonical interpretative framework for the Twelve.

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[25] Childs 1979: 381.
[26] House 2000: 131.

Significantly, the Twelve also ends (Malachi 1-4) with words of the eschatological judgment and restoration of Israel, repeating the theme found in Hosea 1-3. According to Malachi, the LORD will separate the righteous and wicked of Israel based on obedience to the divine law in the "day of the LORD."[27] The Twelve is thus framed by words of eschatological judgment, restoration, and warning for Israel, a thematic *inclusio*.

The theme of eschatological judgment and restoration found in the opening and closing of the Twelve is repeated through out the Twelve in relation to God's covenant people and the nations.[28] Such a literary and thematic arrangement emphasizes the close link between God's dealings with Israel and God's dealings with the nations. There is a strong universalising tendency in the Twelve when read as a whole.

More specifically, the following three related points can be observed in the relationship between God's dealings with Israel and with the nations in the Twelve, as framed by Hosea 1-3 and Malachi. I will draw largely from Childs and House's helpful canonical theological treatments of the Twelve, focusing on the theological ideas that are relevant to the interpretation of Nahum.

(1) The creator God reigns in the whole universe and has a rightful and loving claim on all the nations. The king of the whole earth is thus also the righteous judge of all the nations. Accordingly, God will judge and destroy all sinful kingdoms. God judges his unfaithful covenant people through the nations (Hos 10:10; Zech 14:1-2), and the nations in turn are judged for their cruelty and pride. Ultimately, on the final

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[27] Childs 1979: 497.

[28] On judgment on God's covenant people (Israel and/or Judah), see Joel 1:2-2:11; Amos 2:4-9:10; Micah 1:2-3:12; 6:1-16; Zeph 1:4-13. On restoration of God's covenant people, see Joel 2:18-32; 3:17-21; Amos 9:11-15; Mic 4-5; 7:7-20; Zeph 3:14-20; Hag 2:6-9. On judgment of the nations, see Joel 2:6-11; 3:1-16; Amos 1:3-2:3; Obadiah; Mic 5:15; Nahum; Hab 2:6-20; Zeph 2:1-15; Hag 2:20-22; Zech 9:1-8. On restoration of the nations, see Zeph 2:11; 3:9-11; Zec 2:11; 8:20-23; 9:10; 14:16ff; Mal 1:11,14; 3:12.

day of the LORD's judgment, all enemies of God will be judged and eradicated from the face of the earth. But God's intention is not to destroy either Israel or the nations entirely. Even as Israel "will ultimately be considered 'my people' and 'pitied,'"[29] the nations, too, will be "pitied" and considered "my people" (Zech 14:16). All those who seek and trust in the LORD will be saved (Mic 4:1-5; Nah 1:7; Zech 8:22). God's coming rule will "restore a holy remnant" within Israel and all the nations "to its inheritance within God's kingship" (see Amos 9:8-12; Zeph 2:7, 9; 3:6-20; Zech 14:16).[30]

(2) Divine judgment of all sinful kingdoms and salvation of the remnants of various nations proceed out of God's holy love, his compassionate and jealous character.[31] God expresses intense jealousy and compassion to consume all that is unholy and ungodly in the earth and to restore the earth to righteousness, justice, love, compassion, and faithfulness (Hosea 2:16-23).[32] The God of holy love is continually and passionately loyal to his covenant people Israel "in the face of their flagrant and persistent disloyalty."[33] Thus, after severely chastising his covenant people in his jealous wrath, the LORD in jealousy (Zech 1:14; 8:2) and compassion (Hos 11:4, 8; Mic 7:19; Zech 1:16; 10:6) restores Zion to which the remnants of Israel and nations are gathered (Zec 2:11; 8:20-23). The God of holy love is also merciful and loving to the nations even in the face of their sin, arrogance, and pride. Thus, though severely punishing the nations in his jealous wrath (Zeph 3:8), the LORD also extends compassion to them (Joel 2:13).

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[29] Marvin A. Sweeney 1998: 424.
[30] Childs 1979: 409ff, 415.
[31] For the LORD's jealous character, see Nah 1:2; For the LORD's compassionate nature, see Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2.
[32] Childs (1979: 380-2) points out that the words of judgment and hope to Israel applies to Judah secondarily. House (2000: 128-9) makes a similar comment that the messages of warning, judgment and hope for Israel found in Hosea-Micah equally apply to Gentile nations.
[33] Childs 1979: 382.

(3) God's "judgment and salvation are inextricably joined in the purpose of God."[34] As House rightly states, "punishment is meted out in order to effect cleansing and restoration."[35] This is true not only of God's dealings with Israel, but also of his dealings with the nations (though in different ways). Destruction is not the ultimate purpose of punishment. Rather, punishment serves the ultimate purpose of salvation and restoration of the whole earth. The prophetic words of judgment intend to inspire the fear of the LORD and repentance.[36] God typically gives "a warning to change while change and forgiveness are yet possible."[37] When the warning is followed by repentance, the LORD is eager to show kindness (as in Jonah). When no repentance is forthcoming,[38] sure judgment is warned and carried out to eradicate evil and to create a repentant heart within the chastised (as in Hosea).[39] In either case, the warnings and acts of judgment ultimately serve the purpose of salvation. This is seen in Nahum in which God's decisive judgment of an oppressive and cruel international superpower brings salvation to the oppressed nations, especially the people of God. The day of the LORD oracles most poignantly drive this point home; the LORD, who is the creator, judge, and king, will destroy all forces of evil and bring universal redemption to all creation, and the remnant from the earth will live in peace and blessing. As such, both divine warning and punishment can be seen as arising out of God's merciful and compassionate character (which includes divine justice).[40]

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[34] Childs (1979: 380-381) makes this point in relation to Hosea, in which words of judgment and words of restoration are juxtaposed.

[35] House 2000: 129.

[36] For prophetic call to repentance, see Hos 12:6; 14:1; 14:2; Joel 2:13; Amos 5:4-6; Zech 1:3-4; Mal 3:7.

[37] House 2000: 136. If so, this means divine "judgment is not and never will be inevitable" (137).

[38] Amos laments over unrepentant Israel in 4:6-11, which is sandwiched between stern warnings of a sure judgment.

[39] See Hos 2:7; 3:5.

[40] This point is especially found in Jonah, in which the compassionate nature of God, revealed in Ex 34:6-7, is echoed in the mouth of both the pagan king and the prophet Jonah.

3.2. Literary and Theological Context in the Book of Nahum

3.2.1. Setting

My analysis of the echo in Nah 1 presumes that the final form of the book of Nahum is literarily and theologically meaningful, without finding it necessary to determine the dating and history of the composition of the book of Nahum.[41] That said, the book in its final form reflects a pre-exilic historical setting (though it could have been composed later), which is helpful in understanding its theological meaning. Nahum's message concerns the LORD's decisive response to Assyria's oppression of Judah and other nations.[42] The book reflects a time after the Assyrian destruction of Samaria (722 BC) and after Assyria had made Judah a vassal state. The book portrays the Assyrians as a people of extreme wickedness and brutality (3:1-3). Indeed, the prophet says, "All who hears the reports of you claps their hand over you, for who has not felt your endless cruelty?" (3:19). In this time of Assyrian oppression, the prophet speaks of the fall of Nineveh and the deliverance of Judah by a powerful intervention of the LORD.[43]

3.2.2. Literary Unity of the Book of Nahum

This study will assume that, whatever its compositional history, the book of Nahum is a literary unit comprising various prophecies of Nahum, albeit in varying

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[41] In my view, the time of Nahum's prophetic speeches (regardless of its history of composition) can reasonably be dated between 663 and 612 BC. For support for such pre-exilic dating of the book, see Christensen 1975: 17-30; RL Smith 1984: 63-65; Maier 1980; Richards 1993: 1391; and Sweeney 2000: 421-425.

On exilic setting, and composition by one of the northern exiles, see van der Woude 1977: 108-126. Van der Woude argues that the book was written "in order to encourage the depressed branch of the LORD's people still dwelling in the Promised Land" (124).

On post-exilic dating, see Gunkel 1893; Schulz 1973.

[42] RL Smith 1984: 63.

[43] RL Smith 1984: 63. Nah 3:8-10 speaks of the fall of No-Amon (Thebes), which was carried out by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal in 663 BC. The prophet seems to speak of the fall of Nineveh as imminent (2:1; 3:14,19), and Nineveh fell to a coalition of Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians in 612 BC.

literary forms.[44] Several scholars have challenged this unity and, specifically, have regarded the psalm of 1:2-10 as an interpolation.[45] But, as Childs suggests, the psalm in its final canonical placement has a special function in the interpretation of Nahum's prophecy. Childs rightly states, "The psalm offers a theological interpretation of how to understand the oracles of judgment which constitute the main portion of the book."[46] Specifically, "the implications of the divine claims voiced in the psalm are spelled out in the second half of the chapter in the direct addressing of the two historical entities, Assyria and Judah."[47] Accordingly, I regard Nahum as a literary unit that is structurally, thematically, and theologically coherent. Accordingly, I will study the psalm of 1:2-10 as an integral part of the first chapter, and the first chapter in turn as an integral part of the whole book.

3.2.3. Structural Analysis of the Book of Nahum

A. Superscription (1:1)
B. Introductory psalm concerning the character and power of God (1:2-10)
C. Alternating application of the psalm to Judah and Nineveh (1:11-2:2)
D. Prophetic invectives and divine judgment against Nineveh (2:3-3:19)

3.2.4. A Brief Overview of Nahum and Interpretative Implications

My analysis of Nahum's echo passage will assume the above general outline of the book. In the following subsections 1-4, I will briefly comment on the relevant elements in each section (A-D) of the outline.

(1) The meaning of the prophet's name נַחוּם is intriguing for the interpretation of the message of the book. The name נַחוּם comes from the root נחם,

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[44] See Patterson and Travers (1988: 48-50) for their discussion of the structural and thematic unity of the book. Patterson (1991: 12) points to Carl E. Armerding's discussion of the unity of the book based on recurring words and literary motifs throughout the book. See Spronk (1997: 3-5) for Nahum as a well-structured unity.

[45] Gunkel argued that Chapter 1 is a later interpolation made to serve as an introduction to the whole (Gunkel 1893: 223-244). Others who deny the unity of the book are Bewer 1962: 147; Smith, Ward, and Bewer 1912: 268-269; Blenkinsopp 1983: 147.

[46] Childs 1979: 443.

[47] Childs 1979: 443.

which means "comfort, have compassion."[48] As J.J.M. Roberts points out, "The name may be analysed on the analogy of such names as *hannun* or *rahum* as meaning 'comfort,' or it may be analysed as a shortened form of *nhmyh* (Nehemiah), 'Yahweh has comforted.'"[49] Patterson draws attention to H. Hummel's insight on the significance of the prophet's name:

> It may be accidental (some critics think it deliberately artificial), but the name "Nahum" superbly summarizes the book's message. God's justice means judgment on the enemy, but "comfort" to the faithful.[50]

Hummel adds that this does not mean that God's people do not experience judgment. Rather, the book is not just about divine judgment but is also about divine comfort that comes by way of divine vengeance on wicked and cruel people.

(2) Nahum's introductory psalm,[51] which extends from v.2 to v.10, is the most immediate literary context in which the echo in Nah 1:3 occur. It has been widely argued that the section comprising v.2-10 is a partial acrostic psalm.[52] The reconstruction of the acrostic form, however, requires several unwarranted textual emendations and reordering of words. In my study, I assume the poetic nature of v.2-10, setting aside the question of the extent of its acrostic form. I also assume the

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[48] Sweeney 2000: 420.

[49] Roberts 1991: 41; Noth 1928: 175. Roberts however thinks that the connection between the meaning of the name of the prophet and the prophet's message of comfort "is probably coincidental" (so also Cathcart 1973: 37-38).

[50] Hummel 1979: 342, cited by Patterson 1991: 21.

[51] Nahum 1:2-10 (some 1:2-8) is widely accepted as a psalm or a hymn of praise. On 1:2-10 as an acrostic psalm-unit, see Christensen 1987. He proposes 1:1-10 as a literary unit based on a theory of metrical analysis. With a handful of emendations, he achieves "a perfectly symmetrical metrical structure which extends through ten verses of text (Nah 1,1-10)." Floyd (1994: 432-433) also proposes 1:2-10 to be a unit based on a structural pattern he discerns. Floyd (1994: 436) argues that 1:2-10 is not a hymn but a "prophetic interrogation" that provokes the audience to self-examination.

[52] For untenable claims of a complete acrostic in the emended text of 1:1-2:3, see Gunkel 1893: 223-244.

The more moderate view that the first few verses of the first chapter (usually 1:2-8/10) form a partial acrostic gained wide acceptance. On this view, see Christensen 1975 and 1987; Bic 1968: 76; JDW Watts 1975: 103; De Vries 1966: 476-481; and Roberts 1991: 42-55.

Floyd (1977: 421-437) argues against the acrostic reconstruction of the psalm.

adequacy of Kevin J. Cathcart's conclusion about the general accuracy of the Hebrew text.[53]

The following is a structural analysis of the psalm.

A. A declaration of divine character and power (1:2-3)
   1. The LORD's jealousy and vengeance against his enemies (1:2)
   2. The LORD's great power to be patient and to execute justice (1:3)
B. The cataclysmic effects of the LORD's advent (1:4-6)
C. A declaration of divine character as good and its implication (1:7-8)
   1. Salvation for those who trust in the LORD (1:7)
   2. Destruction of his adversaries (1:8)

The psalm declares the LORD as the supreme, universal judge, who is jealous, powerful, long-suffering, and good. When the divine judge moves in his supreme judgment against his foes, even the earth recoils in his presence. Even as the earth itself trembles and mountains melt away in the LORD's presence, absolutely no one can escape the powerful judgment of God. While the powerful judge of the earth deals severely with his foes, he also tenderly cares for those who trust in him.

The key theological question revolves around the nature of divine judgment in this text. Is it just and righteous? Is there any sign of divine mercy in the psalm's description of the awesome and terrifying wrath and judgment of the LORD? My answer is affirmative, and my discussion of the echoed terms below will show how the text itself warrants this answer.

The declarations that the psalm makes about the LORD's character and acts are universalistic in scope, in keeping with the Twelve's emphasis on the LORD as the judge of the earth. The psalm makes general truth-claims about the nature of the LORD, who is the powerful and supreme ruler and judge of the world. The psalm is placed at the head of the book of Nahum as a kind of interpretative window through which to look at the rest of the book. The psalm asserts a certain perspective on

[53] See Cathcart (1973: 12-14) for the remarkable accuracy of the MT based on "the Pesher of Nahum (4QpNah) found at Qumran; the Hebrew scroll of the Minor Prophets from Wadi Murabba'at, and fragments of a Greek text of the Minor Prophets from Nahal Hever." See also, Haldar 1947: 15-33; RL Smith 1984: 67; Spronk 1997: 2-3. This chapter affirms the general adequacy of this view.

God's character and acts that uses many of the "keywords" that are found in Ex 32-34, including the two echoed phrases that are direct quotations from Ex 34:6-7 (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם and וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה). The strong intertextual relationship between Nah 1:2-10 and Ex 32-34 raises the question of whether there is not some form of *continuity* in the way the terms function and in the understanding of God's character.

(3) The section (1:9-2:2) that immediately follows the psalm is equally important for an accurate interpretation of the strong and weak echoes. The particular perspective on God's character and acts given in the psalm is here specifically applied to Nineveh and Judah in a series of speeches that alternate between messages for Judah and for the foes of the LORD.

a The final nature of divine judgment against his *foes* (1:9-10)
b Words of hope to *Judah* (1:12-13)
a' Divine decree against his *foes* (1:14)
b' The good news of deliverance for *Judah* (1:15)
a" Sarcastic call to his *foes* to muster their strength (2:1)
b" Words of restoration of *Judah* (2:2)

The dual perspective of the psalm is thus repeated in the form and content of the section that follows it: destruction of the LORD's foes and comfort for those who trust in the LORD. This twofold message is applied specifically to God's promise to inflict vengeance on his enemies (specifically Nineveh) and God's promise to end God's own affliction of Judah (which itself is the result of his just vengeance) (1:12). Both the destruction of Assyria and the deliverance of Judah and other nations derive from divine character.[54]

(4) The last part of the book includes oracles concerning the demise of Nineveh (2:3-3:19). This section reinforces the surety of the coming deliverance of Judah and the coming destruction of Nineveh. It begins with a description of the LORD's army that will attack Nineveh (2:3-12). As the LORD is invincible, the LORD's army is described as a powerful force before which proud Nineveh melts away. Next

[54] Childs (1979: 443) concurs with this interpretation.

Nineveh's bloodguilt and degeneracy is described (3:1-4). Nineveh's failings are inimical to the divine character, which is the reason why the LORD is concerned to judge Nineveh. The book ends with further description of the utter destruction of Nineveh and the corresponding celebration of the nations previously oppressed by Nineveh.

The features I have identified in the literary context provided by the whole book have further implications for a proper interpretation of the psalm and the echoes within it. First, it is vitally important not to interpret the whole of the psalm as being entirely about divine vengeance, because vengeance is consistently grouped with the LORD's comfort for those who were oppressed and who trust in the LORD. The message of hope and the message of doom are inextricably intertwined in the book of Nahum. Secondly, it is equally crucial not to distinguish sharply between the "addressees" of the message of vengeance ("does not remit all punishment") and the "addressees" of the message of mercy ("slow to anger"), applying the first exclusively to Nineveh and the second exclusively to Judah. This is so because the LORD's character and acts in the psalm is a collection of general declarations about what God is like and what God does. Such broad claims about God can be applied equally to Nineveh and to Judah. With these in mind, I now turn to a contextual, theological exegesis of the echo in Nah 1:3.

4. A Contextual, Theological Exegesis of Nahum 1:3: The Compatibility of Patience and Vengeance

The task of this section is to show that divine patience and vengeance are compatible and integrated in Nahum as in Ex 32-34 and therefore that God's mercy is present even in Nahum's apparently merciless context. I will also show that Nahum's reuse of the terms from Ex 34:6-7 is contextual, that is, the echoed terms are

appropriate for Nahum's context. The diversity present in the function of Nah 1:3 does not contradict the general witness of Ex 34:6-7 on divine character. Rather, the kind of diversity and flexibility of God found in Nah 1:3 in relation to Ex 34:6-7 affirms the constancy of the divine character in different circumstances.

In the following subsection (4.1), I will examine Nahum's perspective on God's character and acts as presented in the opening psalm. I will do so by examining in detail how the echoed terms (both "strong" and "weak") function in this context. I will pay attention to contextual echoes (as defined in Chapter 1) from Ex 32-34, such as "jealous," "avenging," "wrathful," "mighty in power," and "good." Then in the second subsection (4.2), I will show how the psalm's perspective on God can be and is applied to the two nations that the psalm "targets." I will loosely call these nations Nahum's "addressees," which together constitute his "audience." I will begin my interpretation of the psalm and its echoed terms in relation to Nineveh, since Nineveh is the primary target of the prophecy as a whole. I will then turn to the psalms' application to Judah, to whom the message of Nahum was entrusted.

4.1. God's Character and Acts in the Psalm

The psalm of Nah 1:2-10 starts with a strong declaration:

Nah 1:2-3 The LORD is a jealous and avenging God.
The LORD is an avenging and wrathful lord.
The LORD is avenging against his adversaries.
He keeps watch on his enemies.
[3] The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,
And does not altogether clear the guilty.

As Marvin A. Sweeney rightly states, "The Nahum version of [Ex 34:6-7] is clearly shortened, and represents an attempt to interpret the statement in relation to the rhetorical needs of Nahum, i.e. it emphasizes YHWH's power and capacity for justice against an enemy."[55] Indeed, the psalm highlights the jealous God's wrath (חֵמָה, v.2) that has cataclysmic effects on all creation (v.4-6), as in the day of the LORD (Joel

[55] Sweeney 2000: 428.

2:1-11; Zeph 1:14-18). This presents a stark contrast to Ex 34:6-7, which begins with the declaration that the LORD is "a compassionate and gracious God" (אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן). This contrast may appear to present, as Brueggemann and others suggest, a strong discontinuity or contradiction between the two texts. But a closer examination of the declarations of divine character in Nah 1:2-3 reveals that the two passages are indeed compatible, though each has a contrasting emphasis. I will start with the term קַנּוֹא.

4.1.1. Jealousy of the LORD

The psalm of Nah 1:2-8 starts with a strong pronouncement: "A jealous (קַנּוֹא) and avenging God is the LORD!" (v.2a). Brueggemann offers a general interpretation of the term קַנּוֹא in which the term always refers to God's extreme violent passion.[56] Brueggemann claims the term "refers to "Yahweh's strong emotional response to any affront against Yahweh's prerogative, privilege, ascendancy, or sovereignty. Thus the term assumes Yahweh's singular preoccupation with self" (293).[57] "The extremity of Yahweh's passion will be turned against any who affront Yahweh, and Yahweh will act without restraint or discipline" (294). Yahweh's violent passion may turn against Israel or against Israel's foes, which action may have a positive side effect for Israel. Brueggemann adds, "This savage propensity belongs to the core claims of Yahweh" (293).

Such a description of divine jealousy may appear to be justified by Nahum's context, which does stand in stark contrast to Ex 34:6-7. The formula of Ex 34:6-7 starts with the declaration that the LORD is "a compassionate and gracious God." Nahum's psalm, on the other hand, associates divine jealousy with divine vengeance (נֹקֵם, v.2) and wrath (חֵמָה, v.2) that will have cataclysmic effects (v.4-6). This

[56] Brueggemann cites Zeph 1:18; 3:8; Isa 42:13; Ezek 36:22-32; 39:25-29 to support his point.
[57] Brueggemann (1997: 294) adds, "Yahweh will characteristically choose self-regard, even if to do so requires destructiveness toward Israel."

contrast may appear to present, as Brueggemann and others suggest, a discontinuity between the two texts. But a closer examination of these declarations of God's jealous character reveals that they are indeed compatible, though their emphases are contrasting.

As I have shown in my discussion of Ex 20:5-7 in Chapter 2, divine "jealousy" has dual aspects. That is, divine jealousy includes divine will both *to hold accountable and punish* those who hate God to the "third and fourth generations" (as expressed in the נַקֵּה- and פֹּקֵד-phrases) and *to love* those who love God to "thousands of generations" (as expressed in the וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד-phrase). I also have shown that the LORD's compassionate and gracious character includes, without replacing, the strictly legal or contractual dealing of the LORD expressed in "jealousy." I have said that therefore the declaration "The LORD whose name is jealous (קַנָּא) is a jealous (קַנָּא) God" in Ex 34:14 does not contradict the divine attributes declared in 34:6-7. Rather, 34:14 re-emphasizes the LORD's righteous will to punish evil and evildoers already expressed in 34:6-7.

In Nahum, the declaration that God is a "a jealous (קַנּוֹא) God" does not necessarily deny the LORD's merciful nature but instead calls attention to the LORD's righteous will to punish the idolaters and the enemies of God. While the main emphasis is not divine mercy, the terms of divine patience and justice in v.3 point to the disciplined and just nature of God's wrathful and vengeful expressions of jealousy (see below for further discussion regarding the terms of divine patience and justice). The main difference in Nahum is that God's jealous nature is not directly applied to God's covenant relationship with Israel. Rather, it is declared as a theological generalisation about who God is and then explicitly applied to the whole earth (which would include Judah and all the nations). Divine jealousy in Ex 34 (Ex 34:7b; 34:14) is also a theological generalization about who God is, but in the Exodus context

divine jealousy is specifically applied to Israel as a warning against further apostasy. Such a difference is significant in properly understanding the function of the term קַנּוֹא in relation to Nineveh, Judah, and the nations in Nahum's context.

Consistent with what was discussed in my Chapter 2, in Nahum the term קַנּוֹא emphasizes "the supremacy and incomparability" of the LORD God.[58] The "jealous" God abhors and punishes sin and idolatry. The "jealous" God does not tolerate but punishes false rivals who claim supremacy or worshippers of such false gods.[59] Lest God's enemies and God's people think that God is impotent to punish the wicked, the language of jealousy is invoked with the powerful language of the cosmos itself melting away at the blast of his nostrils. The LORD will indeed destroy all his "foes" and "enemies" (Nah 1:2); the LORD will put an end to them (v.9). The punitive and avenging aspect of divine jealousy is what is stressed in Nahum. But also mentioned in Nahum is the "rewarding" side of the LORD's jealousy. The jealous LORD delivers those who trust in him; the LORD is their protection in the day of trouble (Nah 1:7). Such a theological generalisation of the psalm is applicable to Judah and all the nations of the earth alike. Whoever trusts in the LORD is protected, and whoever plots against the LORD will be destroyed. As such, divine jealousy is strongly other-centred. At the centre of divine jealousy is the righteous judge's concern for justice, righteousness, and salvation in the world. It is a term that connotes God's passionate and redeeming relationship to the whole earth, involving both destructive punishment of his enemies and salvation of God's people. On this point, Nahum is also consistent with the Twelve's presentation of God's burning jealousy that both punishes his foes (whether that be Israel or the nations) and saves his people (starting with the remnant of Israel and then those of the nations).

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[58] Coggins and Re'emi 1985: 20.
[59] RL Smith 1984: 73.

I must clarify one point. As shown above, Brueggemann incorrectly interprets divine jealousy as God's "savage propensity" toward unjustified and undisciplined violence, rising out of God's obsessive self-regard. Brueggemann further claims that such a "savage propensity" directed against the nations has a positive by-product of "the well-being for Israel" (294-5), which Brueggemann says is the case in Nahum (294). Brueggemann is correct in noting that divine jealousy can bring destruction of God's enemies (powerful nations that oppose Israel) and that this can bring a positive result of well-being for Israel. Certainly, books like Joel and Obadiah show that God judges the nations that threaten Israel and delivers Israel from the schemes of destruction. The problem with Brueggemann's interpretation lies in perceiving divine jealousy as "Yahweh's singular preoccupation with self" (293), which sometimes and merely coincidentally has a positive by-product for Israel. While in Brueggemann's interpretation the well-being of Israel (or Judah in Nahum) does not constitute God's primary concern, Nahum's psalm seems to insist on a different view.

Whatever its application within the larger context of Nahum, the theological generalisation that the LORD "protects those who take refuge in him" (which is an aspect of another theological generalisation, namely, that God is jealous) is not presented as merely a side effect of God's destruction of his foes. Nahum's psalm presents both the protection of his people and the destruction of his enemies as God's core concerns and as products of God's attributes of jealousy and goodness.

Although this is not the case in Nahum, there may be times when some people are rescued from the hands of God's enemies as a by-product of God's elimination his enemies. But such well being gained as a by-product rather than as a result of repentance and righteous living can be lost. Ultimately, only those who trust in the LORD will be protected and saved. Such a salvation is probably best understood not as

an accidental by-product of something else but as the outcome of the LORD's commitment to all those who trust in the LORD.

4.1.2. Vengeance of the LORD

The "jealousy" of God is inseparable from the vengeance of God. It is telling that the term referring to God's vengeance נָקַם is used three times immediately following the term for "jealousy" קַנּוֹא in Nah 1:2.

In Ex 32-34, divine "jealousy" and punishment (פָּקַד) are also directly related to the fact that the LORD does not acquit the guilty altogether or remit all punishment, as expressed in וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה. In Ex 34:7b (and in Ex 20:5-7), וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה means that God will "visit (פָּקַד) the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and forth generations." In continuity with Ex 34:7b, Nahum's psalm reuses the expression וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה, which emphasizes that the LORD will indeed hold the guilty accountable for wrong done. The repeated use of the term נָקַם in Nahum further emphasizes the certainty of divine vengeance on those who are found guilty. Perhaps for the purpose of stressing the sure and imminent nature of divine vengeance on his foes, Nahum's psalm uses the term נָקַם rather than the פָּקַד-phrase used in Ex 34:7b, suggesting the possibility of deferment of punishment.

In Ex 34:7b, the expression "third and fourth" in the פָּקַד–phrase sets a limit on the "just amount" of God's vengeance (פָּקַד). In Nahum, although the explicit limitation of vengeance to the "third and fourth" is not found, the basically equivalent meaning of a disciplined legal appropriateness is present. Most commentators recognise that the term נָקַם refers to a *legal or juridical* transaction in Nahum.[60] "Avenging and vengeance arise from a legal sense of justifiable vindication and not rancorous retaliation."[61] "The LORD's vengeance will bring in . . . just compensation

[60] Bic 1968: 77; Coggins and Re'emi 1985: 20; Richards 1993: 1392; Roberts 1991: 49.
[61] Richards 1993: 1392. See Ps 94.

for wrong done, and no more."[62] Klaas Spronk rightly states that this divine attribute "is not to be compared with human spontaneous outbursts of anger," for it is a "continuing quality or characteristic (virtually a 'function') of YHWH."[63] He adds, "The primary accent should not be on the violence, but on vengeance making an end to evil . . . . Just as jealousy can be regarded as an aspect of love, vengeance is related to justice."[64] In short, both נֹקֵם and וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה in Nahum point to divine righteous dealings with sinners.

While both passages in Exodus and Nahum convey the divine will to hold the guilty accountable and punish the sinner, there is one major difference in the application of divine just vengeance. In Ex 32-34, God did not clear guilty Israel but meted out appropriate punishment and deferred much of its punishment in order to affirm Israel's continued life with God. In Nahum, the LORD "will not overlook evil"[65] and will not remit all punishment, but will carry out his righteous vengeance against his foes in order that life be made viable for the people of God. As William P. Brown states, "God does not allow human injustice to have the final say."[66] All enemies of God will ultimately be punished and the people of God vindicated. Lest anyone doubt God's power to overcome evil and bring about justice, Nahum's psalm paints "a graphic picture of God's unsurpassable power."[67] "Divine power is likened to fire,"[68] and the whole earth is depicted as languishing in the LORD's burning wrath. "God will not let injustice prevail. With all of nature at God's behest, no one can

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[62] Coggins and Re'emi 1985: 20.
[63] Spronk 1997: 34.
[64] Spronk 1997: 34.
[65] JDW Watts 1975: 104.
[66] Brown 1996: 71.
[67] Brown 1996: 71.
[68] Coggins and Re'emi 1985: 25.

withstand God's fierce power."[69] Nahum's psalm praises this God, whose vengeance and "avenging" is powerful, effective, and good.[70]

4.1.3. Wrath of the LORD

Nahum's psalm depicts the LORD as pouring out like fire his "burning anger" (חֲרוֹן אַף; v.6) on the day of vengeance. As with God's "burning anger" in Exodus, the term חֲרוֹן אַף here is related to the "jealousy" of God. חֲרוֹן אַף is a "jealous" God's holy response to sin; it is "the attitude of God toward sin and impenitent and persistent sinners."[71] At the time of vengeance, the "jealous God" unleashes powerful and just wrath against his enemies. Thus Nahum's psalm says,

> **Nah 1:6** Who can stand before his indignation?
> Who can abide in his burning anger?
> His wrath pours out like fire,
> and rocks are shattered by him.

When the lord of wrath rises in vengeance, even the "cosmic entities…collapse and languish in his presence."[72] Such a powerful and fearful image of God is indeed bad news for his enemies.

The LORD's fierce and all-consuming wrath, however, is not uncontrolled or utterly separated from divine patience. This point is supported by lexical evidence found in two related phrases: בַּעַל חֵמָה and וְנוֹטֵר הוּא לְאֹיְבָיו. Nahum's psalm calls God "a lord of wrath" (בַּעַל חֵמָה, v.2b), who "reserves wrath for his enemies" (וְנוֹטֵר הוּא לְאֹיְבָיו, v.2d). I will comment on בַּעַל חֵמָה first.

Some commentators like Richard J. Coggins and S. Paul Re'emi see "association with the Canaanite gods El and Baal" in the phrase בַּעַל חֵמָה.[73]

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[69] Brown 1996:71.

[70] Coggins and Re'emi (1985: 20) say that divine vengeance is "indeed strongly positive" and that the negative connotation present in English "vengeance" is not even implicitly present in the Hebrew.

[71] Patterson (1991: 16) suggests that the prophet maybe sharing such a divine attitude in his prophetic "wish" for the destruction of Nineveh.

[72] Christensen 1975: 23.

[73] E.g. Coggins and Re'emi 1985: 21; Spronk 1997, 35. See 2 Sam 5:20; 11:21; 1 Chr 8:33; 1Chr 14:7; Prov 22:24 for other uses of בַּעַל to refer to the LORD.

Coggins and Re'emi also point out the fact that "the word *baal* in Hebrew means simply 'master' or 'lord.'"[74] They add, "so that the phrase here represents a Hebrew idiom which is perfectly properly translated 'wrathful,' as in the RSV."[75] However, they do not explain why or how being a "lord" or "master" of wrath "perfectly properly" translates into "wrathful." It would seem that "wrathful" suggests that God is enflamed and overcome by wrath. Thus, my inclination is to render בַּעַל חֵמָה simply as "the lord of anger," that is, one who has complete control over his wrath. A Midrash records a similar understanding:

> "Rabbi said: A human being is mastered by his anger, but the Holy One, blessed be He, masters anger, as it says, *The LORD avengeth and mastereth wrath.* Rabbi Jonathan said: A human being is mastered by his jealousy, but the Holy One, blessed be He, masters his jealousy, as it says, *The LORD is God over jealousy and vengeance*" (Midrash Rabba Gen. 49:8).[76]

If this analysis is correct and may be brought to bear upon the interpretation of בַּעַל חֵמָה, the Hebrew phrase may be understood as pointing to the disciplined nature of divine anger. Vengeance without "mastery" over wrath would be "unrestrained" and "beyond sanction" (Brueggemann) or have "no trace of mitigating divine mercy" (Fishbane). However, the expression בַּעַל חֵמָה affirms that the LORD has mastery over wrath.

I now turn to the phrase וְנוֹטֵר הוּא לְאֹיְבָיו. The main lexical meaning of the root נטר is "to keep watch" or "to guard" (Song of Songs 1:6; 8:11,12). In its other uses (Lev 19:8; Pss 94:1; 103:9; Jer 3:5; 3:12), נטר has the basic meaning of "to keep watch" but "with the idea of anger being supplied by the context."[77] Such

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[74] Coggins and Re'emi 1985: 21.

[75] Coggins and Re'emi 1985: 21.

[76] Cited by Spronk 1997: 21. This commentary, although not made specific to the phrase in question in Nahum, is an insightful one.

[77] Patterson 1991: 27. For the phrase וְנוֹטֵר הוּא לְאֹיְבָיו, the translation "and he rages" (Cathcart1973: 43; RL Smith 1984: 72) and "and he directs his wrath" (JDW Watts 1975: 102) have been suggested. Patterson (1991:26) points out that such translations are based on the postulation of "a second root נטר that signifies 'rage,' 'be in fury.'" The postulated root נטר is taken to be a stative verb, where as the

appears to be Nahum's usage of the term נטר. J.M.P. Smith, W.H. Ward, and J.A. Bewer point out, "the root נטר may be traced to an Arabic verb 'see' and rendered 'observeth with an angry eye.'"[78] The Hebrew root נטר in the context of Nahum also seems to mean "to watch or observe with an angry eye." If so, the phrase וְנוֹטֵר הוּא לְאֹיְבָיו may be rendered "he watches his enemies" with an angry eye. The reason for such an observation would be to hold the enemies accountable for their sin. A God who does not vigilantly watch his enemies cannot adequately hold them responsible for wrong done. Thus, implicit in "watching" is the idea that the LORD's punishment will be in proportion to the crime committed and observed. Also implicit in the notion of God "observing his enemies" is the idea that the LORD "reserves" his wrath so as not to hastily punish his foes.[79] The LORD "watches" his enemies and reserves his wrath in order to justly punish his foes at an appropriate time.[80]

The two phrases בַּעַל חֵמָה and וְנוֹטֵר הוּא לְאֹיְבָיו point to the fact that the LORD is patient even with his foes, that is, until the day of vengeance when they will be destroyed. By the same token, these two phrases strongly suggest that the LORD is capable of wrath and vengeance that no one can withstand or endure (cf. v.6). In this sense, these two phrases meaningfully relate not only to the expression of *vengeance*

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first root נטר is transitive ("guard" or "keep"). Based on such a postulation, נטר is variously translated as "bear a grudge" (Lev 16:18), "keep anger" (Ps 103:9), and "be angry" (Jer 3:5, 12). In Nahum's context, the translation "he rages" for נטר would parallel the translation "wrathful" for בַּעַל חֵמָה and thus appear to be perfectly proper. However, Patterson (1991: 27) draws attention to Walter A. Maier's conclusion that "all of the suggested instances where [נטר] seem[s] to be stative are simply cases of elliptical constructions (i.e. the verb [itself] meaning 'maintain/reserve,' with the idea of anger being supplied by the context)." Patterson further comments (after Maier 1980: 52-62) that this understanding of the term נטר "does not need to posit a conjectured root that has undergone phonetic change, and it has the advantage of being contextually more sound in that the traditional meaning anticipates the sentiment of the next verse."

[78] Smith, Ward, and Bewer 1912: 297.

[79] Stonehouse (1929:103) suggests, "he reserveth wrath."

[80] In Lev 19:18, God commands Israel not to take a vengeance (נקם) and not to "observe" or "keep an angry eye" (נטר) on a fellow Israelite. Such a command presupposes that the vengeance belongs to the LORD (Psa 94:1), the LORD has a day of vengeance (Isa 34:8; 61:2), and the LORD's vengeance will be just (Jer 11:20).

(נֹקֵם יְהוָה לְצָרָיו) that is sandwiched between the two, but also to the expression of *patience* (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם) that immediately follows them.

4.1.4. Patience of the LORD

I have already discussed in Chapter 2 that the literal (etymological) meaning of the construct form אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם is "long of nostrils," conveying the idea that divine anger is held for a long time before it is expressed. The LORD will not react in sudden anger at human provocation. The LORD "suffers long" with sinners in his patience.

For Nahum's context, however, Fishbane suggests the translation "*long* of anger," implying that the LORD's anger lasts long in his war against Nineveh.[81] Fishbane suggests that such a strong revision and adaptation is made to emphasize God's vengeance in his "war" against Nineveh. I would assert, however, that while the book's emphasis is on the LORD's vengeance against his foes, this does not necessarily mean that the book completely ignores or glosses over the LORD's patient and merciful character. Changing the translation of אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם in this manner creates the impression that the idiom of patience is "*vengefully reapplied*" here, and the prophet is indeed preaching "wrath and doom, *with no trace of mitigating divine mercy*" (italics mine).[82] But if an interpreter is not *a priori* committed to the notion that God only shows wrath and vengeance to his enemies (or like Brueggemann, convinced that burning wrath and severe punishment are incompatible with divine mercy and patience), there is no need to give an unusual translation to the idiom.

As I noted above, Brueggemann holds that the expression of patience אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם in Nahum's context has no function other than to point out that the LORD has run out of his patience. Divine mercy is seen to be absent in Nahum's theological

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[81] Fishbane 1977: 280.

[82] Fishbane 1985: 347. אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם is an "idiom" or "stock phrase" which has stable meaning in all of its occurrences. The term אֶרֶךְ appears fifteen times in the Old Testament, always in construct form. Thirteen times it occurs in construct to the term אַפַּיִם, and then once to the term אֶבְרָה ("wing") and once to רוּחַ ("wind, breath, spirit"). But Fishbane treats the construct אֶרֶךְ in isolation from its complement term אַפַּיִם and suggests varying translations for the two texts.

generalisation about divine character. Whether Brueggemann's interpretation is correct is determined largely by whether the usual meaning of patience for אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם fits Nahum's context well, as its other occurrences do in their contexts. If it does, there is no need for a varying translation of the idiom or for dismissing it as having a minimal function in the context.

If one retains the meaning of "patience" for אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם in Nah 1:3, it yields the interpretation that when God is refraining from destructive and final vengeance on his foes, "it is out of merciful forbearance, not out of weakness."[83] If God is indeed patient and forbearing with his enemies, when God does finally destroy his enemies no one can question the appropriateness of his actions. Such functions of the idiom אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם with the translation "patience" underline God's merciful nature and the justice of his vengeance.

There is other textual evidence that insists on keeping the usual meaning "patience" for אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם. As already mentioned above, the phrases בַּעַל חֵמָה and וְנוֹטֵר הוּא לְאֹיְבָיו in v.2 hint at the LORD's patience with his enemies. If so, the expressions אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם, בַּעַל חֵמָה and וְנוֹטֵר הוּא לְאֹיְבָיו are mutually inclusive affirmations about God. These three expressions function together to explain that God will not "act upon the impulse of sudden outbursts of wrath."[84] The "lord of wrath" is "slow to anger" and in forbearance "observes his enemies," until the day of vengeance. When the LORD punishes, he directs his wrath upon his enemies in a purposeful and just manner (however violent or destructive the punishment might be).

4.1.5. Power of the LORD

That God's wrath and vengeance are controlled is affirmed also in the expression גְּדָל־כֹּחַ. This phrase immediately follows "slow to anger" and

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[83] Brown 1996: 71.
[84] Smith, Ward, and Bewer 1912: 289

immediately precedes "does not altogether clear the guilty" in v.3. The term גְּדָל points to the incomparability of God's power even as everything about God is incomparable to anything human. As applied to God, גְּדָל־כֹּחַ may then be interpreted as "of supreme power." The expression גְּדָל־כֹּחַ is placed in between the two echoed terms of divine vengeance and divine patience in a meaningful way that is contradictory to neither and illuminating to both.[85] The placement of גְּדָל־כֹּחַ emphasizes the surety of divine mercy and vengeance on his enemies.[86] There are several other scriptural passages that use an equivalent phrase or idea in a similar manner.[87] Indeed, in the echo in Num 14:17f, the greatness of divine power is evoked to emphasize both divine patience and justice; "*Let the power* of the Lord *be great* (יִגְדַּל־נָא כֹּחַ אֲדֹנָי) according to your promise, saying 'The LORD is *slow to anger* (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם) . . . not altogether acquitting the guilty.'"[88]

The striking and surprising juxtaposition of God's great power and patience yields the interpretation that the LORD is supremely patient even with his enemies. The LORD's incomparable patience is highlighted in the Jewish Publication Society's Tanakh translation of גְּדָל־כֹּחַ in Nah 1:3, "The LORD is slow to anger and *of great*

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[85] Against this view, Smith, Ward, and Bewer (1912: 289) argue that God's being גְּדָל־כֹּחַ is not exclusively or even primarily moral strength in this context, but mainly his sovereignty over all of his creation as Nah 1:3-6 depicts.

[86] Calvin 1950 (*Minor Prophets* vol. 3): 421-422.

[87] The construct גְּדָל־כֹּחַ occurs only here in Nah 1:3, but one can find virtually equivalent expressions used of God in other passages, e.g., אֶת־הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה (Ex 14:31), כֹּחַ גָּדוֹל (Ex 32:11), and כֹּחוֹ הַגָּדֹל (Deut 4:37). These speak of God who *with mighty power* delivered Israel out of its oppressor Egypt. Also in Ps 147:5, the construct רַב־כֹּחַ is used in the exact way as is the construct גְּדָל־כֹּחַ: "Great is our LORD and *mighty in power*." To God is attributed mighty power for his mercy on his people and judgment of the wicked. In Job 23:6, God's great power (רָב־כֹּחַ) is related to God carrying out judging or pressing charge.

[88] Both passages also omit the opening two terms of the formula, "merciful and compassionate" beginning their citation of it with "slow to anger." Such similarities might be said to establish an intertextual link between Nah 1:2-3 and Num 14:18. Indeed, Nah 1:2-3 could legitimately be called an echo passage of Num 14:17-18, in addition to being an echo passage of Ex 34:6. The thematic correspondences are obvious (see below), and the literary correspondences are seen in that both use same terms (in different forms).

forbearance, but does not remit all punishment."[89] The LORD's great forbearance allows his enemies a chance to repent and calls them to trust in the LORD and be saved on the great day of vengeance of the LORD (Nah 1:7). The greatness of divine patience (that is, self-control) guarantees that the LORD will not rise in sudden rage, and when God does punish, his punishment will not be uncontrolled but will be deserved and just.

The juxtaposition of God's great power and justice assures that God will indeed hold the guilty accountable with his immense might. God is supremely powerful to judge and punish even the most powerful or wicked. God's power to bring about justice "gives profound assurance" to God's people in the face of terrible evil in the world.[90] Indeed, as John D.W. Watts says, the combination of the phrases וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה and גְּדָל־כֹּחַ assures God's people that God lacks no power to produce justice.[91] God's power to affect justice would also function to strongly warn his enemies of the coming destruction and call them to repentance.

Thus, God's power is related to God's supreme moral strength to be patient even with his enemies and be just in his vengeance. God's power is also related to God's supreme power over the world to eradicate evil and restore peace and order.[92]

4.1.6. Goodness of the LORD

The term טוֹב in Nah 1:7 is instructive in interpreting the string of affirmations of God in Nahum's psalm. The term טוֹב can be regarded as a thematic echo of the similarly comprehensive term "goodness" (טוֹב) from Ex 33:19 discussed in Chapter 2. I have shown there that divine goodness comprehends all the attributes and affirmations that God revealed in the formula in 34:6-7, including divine jealousy and

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[89] Similarly Milgrom (1990: 111) comments that גְּדָל־כֹּחַ that follows "slow to anger" "emphasizes divine forbearance. 'Who is mighty? He who conquers his passion' (Mish. Avot 4:1)."

[90] Richards 1993: 1391, says this in relation to Assyria.

[91] JDW Watts 1975: 104.

[92] The points made in this paragraph work against Brueggemann's assertion that the phrase "great in power" (גְּדָל־כֹּחַ) "intrudes" upon the usual pattern of the echoes of Ex 34:6-7. (1997: 226).

retribution. Similarly, "the LORD is good" here may be viewed as a comparable "nutshell" declaration of God's character. That God is jealous, avenging, the lord of wrath, observer of his enemies, patient, powerful, just, and punishing may be seen as part of what it means that "the LORD is good."

If so, just as the nutshell expression "all my goodness" (Ex 33:19) includes all the divine attributes of Ex 34:6-7, the declaration "The LORD is good" (טוֹב יְהוָה) in Nah 1:7 may include all the divine attributes listed in Nahum's psalm. As such, the declaration "The LORD is good" may affirm the mutually-inclusive and "mutually-interpretative" nature of God's attributes in Nahum, just as "all my goodness" implies mutuality of all the divine attributes of Ex 34:6-7.

It is no surprise then that immediately following the declaration that "the LORD is good" comes the dual message of protection of those who trust in the LORD and destruction of those who plot against the LORD. The basic meaning of the attributes found in Ex 34:6-7 applies here—both divine mercy and judgment are altogether good. One major difference in Nahum is that Nahum's psalm puts emphasis on the *avenging aspect* of God's goodness. This is because the psalm is intended for a particular application, which calls for divine vengeance to predominate.

The reference to God's goodness as simultaneously delivering and avenging (1:7-8) confirms that one expression of the nature of God does not exclude or cancel out another expression. Neither do God's attributes change depending on the situation. Rather, the constancy of God's character means that divine actions change in just and righteous correspondence to the actions of the nations or people in view. In Nahum's psalm, the constancy of God's character as good requires that he judge and punish severely his "enemies" or "foes" (v.2) and even the whole earth (v.4-6). By conquering all evil, God will establish all peoples within his kingdom of

righteousness.[93] To this end, God's goodness will remain constant in all his dealings with his people and the nations.

I have shown how the echoed terms from Ex 32-34 are integrated to bear witness to the constancy of divine character as good (avenging, just, powerful, and patient) in Nahum's psalm. I also have shown that the echo of Ex 34:6-7 is indeed fitting in the context of Nahum's psalm. I have shown that Nahum's emphasis on divine vengeance does not contradict but affirms the general witness of Ex 34:6-7. In fact, it is the flexibility of God's action according to his attributes (or according to his compassion and mercy shown in freedom) and consistent with varying human actions that powerfully affirms God's constant character good. In the context of God's "enemies" and "foes" who must be punished severely in order for God's justice, righteousness, and salvation to be established, total "uniformity" in God's action (i.e. God doing the *same* thing he did in the *different* situation of Ex 32-34) would actually be what would *deny* God's goodness or the constancy of his character. That God is constantly and consistently good means God's actions will be flexible in accordance with the varying situations that goodness comes up against.

The remaining task, then, is to perceive how these more general theological affirmations of divine character, especially patience and vengeance, are applied to Nineveh and Judah respectively. The general claims made thus far in this chapter will hold up specifically in relation to Nineveh and Judah. I will first turn to Nineveh and then secondly to Judah.

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[93] Childs (1992: 373) says. "The divine intent for Israel is not a people at rest unless it is within a city of righteousness."

4.2. Application to Nineveh

4.2.1. Powerful Vengeance on Nineveh

"A jealous God" (אֵל קַנּוֹא) or an "avenging God" does not tolerate rivals. In Nahum, the false rivals are not only the "gods" of Nineveh (1:14; 3:4)—but also, more significantly, Nineveh itself. Nineveh had risen to the height of international power, and is decidedly set against the LORD (Nah 1:11). Nineveh makes arrogant claims about its "divine" sovereignty and supremacy (Zeph 2:15; Isa 47:10).[94] The jealous God, therefore, will avenge Assyria for standing against God's sovereignty and righteous ways.[95] Zephaniah 2:13-15 concurs with Nahum that Assyria will be utterly destroyed.

Not only is Nineveh arrogant; it is also oppressive and domineering. Nineveh abuses its power to oppress Judah and the nations. Nineveh wrongs them in arrogance, cruelty, oppression, treachery, violence, idolatry, and greed (Nah 3). Nineveh is indeed God's "enemy" and "foe" (1:2), among those who "oppose" and "plot against the LORD" (1:9) and his righteous purposes for Israel and the nations. God is therefore "jealous" for his own people and the nations. The expression וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה emphasizes that "Yahweh, as a God of justice . . . will not let injustice and oppression go unpunished."[96] Unlike mortal rulers who overlook injustice and "fail to redress the wrongs done to the helpless," God is neither indifferent nor impotent.[97] The jealous God is indeed the divine king who is bent on

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[94] Assyria claims supremacy which belongs to God alone (Deut 32:39; Isa 43:11; 45:5-6, 18, 21-22)

[95] The treatment of Assyria in Isa 1-39 displays a parallel pattern to what is found in Nahum. Assyria is chosen by God as a "rod of anger" (Isa 10:5) to be used in God's judgment of Judah, but its arrogance and self-will leads it into a position in which Assyria itself will need to be judged by God (Isa 10:13-14; 37:24ff). In Nahum, God has been using Assyria to judge Judah (see 1:12-3, discussed below), and now Assyria's day of judgment has come.

[96] Roberts 1991: 39.

[97] Eaton 1961: 57.

securing righteousness, not only for Judah but also for the nations.[98] God will bring justice for the oppressed by avenging the city of Nineveh.

Thus, the LORD will rise against his enemy Nineveh in "wrath" (חֵמָה). God's righteous "burning anger" (חֲרוֹן אַף) and "fury" (חֵמָה) will be "poured out like fire" (נִתְּכָה כָאֵשׁ) (v.6). Again, the LORD's mercy does *not* imply that he "remits all punishment" (Nah 1:3). He will carry out his vengeance within disciplined legal appropriateness and with awesome power. His vengeance will be complete and will not fail.

Here I must make a crucial observation. In Nahum's day, the just compensation for over a century of as-yet-unpunished, unrestrained sins (Nah 3:1-4, 19) looks different than the just compensation for the idolatry of Israel in Exodus, as grave a sin as that was. Assyria had probably persisted in idolatry and cruel oppression of Judah and other nations for over a century (Nah 3:1-4, 19),[99] and its arrogance had grown accordingly. God therefore requires that the city of Nineveh fall under complete destruction. Nineveh's injury is fatal: "There is no healing for your fracture, your wound is fatal" (Nah 3:19). "Nineveh's idolatry, rapacity, inordinate pride, and endless cruelty were so great that they called for divine intervention (1:11, 14: 2:11-13; 3:4-7, 19)"[100] that would put an end to it all. Whatever they plot against the LORD, he in his awesome power "will make an end (of it); trouble will not arise a second time" (1:9).[101] The harsh words of Nahum's psalm alert Nineveh to the urgency and seriousness of the situation. God has been patient with Nineveh, but the day of punishment is now imminent. Just as God did not clear guilty Israel but

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[98] Eaton 1961: 58.
[99] Israel had gone into Assyrian exile in 722 and Judah had long felt the effects of Assyrian oppression as a vassal state. See above.
[100] Patterson 1991: 16.
[101] Patterson 1991: 16.

brought an appropriate punishment for its sin (Ex 32-34; Num 14), Nineveh must, in an appropriate way, be held accountable.

In its application to Nineveh, the expression וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה is used in a way that is consistent with its meaning in the formula of Ex 34:6-7. The phrase functions within the same range of meaning already suggested by the formula and its context in Exodus. The expression of God's jealous wrath and vengeance is not uncontrolled or "undisciplined and well beyond the enactment of sanctions" as Brueggemann proposes.[102] Rather, the presentation of God's relationship to human sin in Nahum fits into a consistent pattern evident in God's vengeance in Exodus, and, indeed, in other biblical passages. A nation commits a serious sin such as idolatry. The LORD declares them guilty. The jealous God is aroused to righteous wrath, which he intends to pour out on such an enemy. When he executes his judgment, he does so with power, justice, and patience.

4.2.2. Traces of Mercy to Nineveh

In relation to Nineveh, the proclamation that God is "slow to anger" (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם) functions to explain why God has *not yet* punished Nineveh. The LORD is patient and therefore has been deferring the punishment against Nineveh. Fishbane claimed that "*assuages* anger" of Ex 34:6 becomes "*long* of anger" Nah 1:3. Fishbane suggests varying translations in his apparent effort to have the idiom fit the emphases on mercy in Ex 34:6 and vengeance in Nah 1:3 without undue tension.[103] But as my discussion begins to show, there is no tension between the context of Nahum and the basic meaning of patience in the idiom אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם.

I have shown in Ex 32-34 that God does not act in sudden anger. The LORD in his patience defers due punishment and gives an opportunity for human intervention

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[102] Brueggemann 1997: 271. Roberts' similar comment that "[God] has a violent temper" is also unwarranted by the text (1991: 49).
[103] See footnote 50.

or intercession, and ultimately for repentance. Likewise, God's patience applies to Assyria, for all nations belong to the LORD. As Patterson aptly comments,

> [Nahum 1:2-3] is important for understanding the process of God's vengeance: His judicial wrath is not always immediate. At times He holds in reserve His wrath against His foes until the proper occasion. God's government, including His judicial processes, is on schedule, even though to an awaiting mankind His timing may seem to lag.[104]

God's self-control, patience, and righteousness are demonstrated even in the fact that God gives advance warning through the prophet Nahum.[105] The ultimate intention of prophetic announcements of judgment is very often to warn of destruction and invite the repentance of a wicked nation. This is so because the LORD does not delight in the destruction of the wicked (*pace* Brueggemann; cf. Ezekiel 33:11). Divine reluctance to punish is illustrated in Zephaniah in which the judgment oracles against the nations, including Assyria (Zeph 2:4-15), are sandwiched between a call to repentance (Zeph 2:1-3) and a condemnation for refusal to repent (Zeph 3:1-8). Although destruction is imminent, each nation is called to humble itself (as Assyria does in Jonah) and seek righteousness before the day of the LORD's wrath and fiery jealousy (Zeph 2:1-3).

In addition, the expression אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וּגְדָל־כֹּחַ points to the greatness of divine patience. The expression וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה along with אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וּגְדָל־כֹּחַ points to the controlled *manner* in which God carries out his vengeance. God's wrath (חֵמָה) that will be poured upon Nineveh will be controlled, timely, purposeful, and just. This ensures that even the severest expression of divine wrath is never outside the merciful and righteous limits that God himself has set. A total destruction of Assyria is within the bounds of God's righteousness. Brueggemann's idea that God's wrath in Nahum is "unrestrained" is therefore out of place. God is "the lord of wrath"

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[104] Patterson (1991: 25) makes this comment on Nah 1:2.
[105] Eaton 1961: 54.

who in his "slowness to anger" will ensure that his wrath is "governed by infinite patience and purpose."[106]

4.3. Application to Judah

The "address" or application of the psalm of Nah 1:2-10, including the echo in 1:3, is rather subtle and implicit. Therefore, in order to understand how the psalm should be best applied to Judah, it must be read in close connection to the alternating direct addresses to Assyria and Judah in the verses that follow it (1:9-2:2).

4.3.1. Traces of Vengeance on Judah

Most importantly, I must briefly consider the LORD's words: "Though I have afflicted you, O Judah, I will afflict you no more" (1:12). Scholars rightly have pointed out that there is no explicit mention of the sin of Judah in the entire book of Nahum. Some scholars, however, mistake this as an indication that in Nahum there is no recognition of, or concern for, Judah's sin at all.[107] This is clearly an over-generalisation. The reference to how God has "afflicted" Judah is a reference to God's punishment for Judah's *sins*, albeit sins of the past. Indeed, when the words "I have afflicted you, Judah" are read in the light of Nahum's psalm, the words convey that Judah itself has been experiencing the reality of divine jealousy, wrath, and vengeance (cf. 1:2-3). In addition, the words "I have afflicted you, Judah" point to judgment oracles against Judah found in the Twelve, such as Hos 5:5-14; Am 2:4-5; Ob 1:12; Mic 1:3-3:12. These passages make plain that Judah has undergone a severe punishment for its idolatry, pride, injustice, and oppression.

Clearly, the declaration of divine jealousy and vengeance in Nahum's psalm can therefore be meaningfully applied to Judah. This is especially so since the revelation of divine jealousy is first and foremost revealed to the people of God

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[106] Eaton 1961: 58.

[107] Like Smith, Ward, and Bewer 1912: 280f and others after them.

(Ex 20:5; 34:14). That the LORD is a "jealous God" in relation to Judah points to their covenant relationship, which is often described by means of the metaphor of marriage. Judah (or Israel) is "the object of God's eternal love."[108] Parts of the Old Testament make it explicit that Israel (inclusive of Judah) is intended to be holy to the LORD. When Israel is unfaithful, the jealous LORD chastises Israel. Israel/Judah is portrayed as a wayward wife (Jer 2:4ff; Hos 1-3), given over to a brazen harlotry (Eze 16:15,43), rejected by God (Isa 54:4ff), and thus incurring severe chastisement (Eze 16:53ff).[109] Although the book of Nahum paints no such picture of Judah directly, it can be inferred from the statement that the "jealous" God (Nah 1:2) has been afflicting Judah (1:12).

In this larger canonical context, the citation of וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה from the formula, especially with its associations with the aftermath of the golden calf in Ex 32-34, functions to remind Judah of, and confront Judah with, its own past and present sins, especially its sins of idolatry. Stonehouse rightly comments that וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה hints at the fact that the distress Judah was experiencing was not altogether undeserved.[110] In addition, as Coggins and Re'emi have shown, the terms "enemies" and "foes" do apply not only to God's enemies like Nineveh, but also to Judah in unfaithfulness.[111] As such, Judah has become God's enemy and the holy and righteous God has punished Judah. The reason the people are afflicted is because they have greatly offended the jealous, avenging God.

A closely related point is that וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה, together with other contextual echoes from Ex 32-34, functions as a warning to Judah regarding the deserved consequences of its sins. Just as this phrase declares to Nineveh that his righteous wrath will be poured down on Nineveh, it also warns Judah against audaciously

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[108] Patterson 1991: 22.
[109] For more detailed discussion of these passages, see Patterson 1991: 22-23.
[110] Stonehouse 1929: 103.
[111] Coggins and Re'emi (1985) 21.

presuming upon God's mercy.[112] Judah could fall under God's punishment—as indeed it already had, and as it surely would in the coming exile. The expression וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה in the context of the "awesome terror of God's avenging power" [113] depicted in the psalm functions to inspire fear in Judah. As Roberts put it, God's avenging power is "frightening, because it is a reminder that Yahweh is a God with whom one cannot trifle."[114] God's righteous intention is "not to remit all punishment," but to continue to hold his people accountable. Patterson quotes H. Hummel's apt comment,

> The book thus exemplifies the role which "Gentile oracles" play in all the prophets. The point is not that God's people go scot-free, but precisely the reverse: if God so judges those whom He employs temporarily as instruments of His judgment upon His unfaithful people, how much more fearful the judgment upon His own people if they finally miss the message.[115]

4.3.2. Divine Mercy on Judah

The main function of אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם for Judah in Nahum is probably to explain why God had not brought vengeance and destruction on Nineveh earlier. Under Nineveh's unbearable and cruel oppression, Judah possibly could doubt God's faithfulness and power.[116] "Slow to anger" functions to assure Judah (and the nations) that "God has his own timetable for justice."[117]

Despite the opportunity being given to Nineveh (as shown in the forgoing paragraphs), Nahum's *main* emphasis is that of testifying to how the tables have now turned in Judah's favour. As Roberts puts it, Nahum's primary task "is not to call Judah to account for sin, but to reassure Judah that Yahweh has seen his people's

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[112] Calvin 1950 (Moses vol. 3): 388.
[113] Roberts 1991: 39
[114] Roberts 1991: 39.
[115] Hummel 1979: 342, cited by Patterson 1991: 21.
[116] Brown (1996: 71) suggests, "Nahum's audience evidently doubted whether God was up to the task of executing judgment and changing the current state of injustice."
[117] JDW Watts 1975: 103.

affliction and that he is about to take vengeance on Judah's cruel and unjust oppressor."[118] The righteous character of God and his awesome power to execute his righteousness affirm that "the oppressor will not have the last word. Deliverance will come, for soon Yahweh will repay the oppressor in full for his evil deeds."[119] Nineveh is now the enemy of God whom God will punish in the near future, and Judah is the past enemy of God whom God now pardons. Hence, God's vengeance on Nineveh is simultaneously the termination of divine vengeance on Judah.[120] This point is related to the ultimate, merciful purpose that divine wrath and vengeance serves. Elmer B. Smick's comment is appropriate:

> God's vengeance must never be viewed apart from his purpose to show mercy. He is not *only* the God of wrath, but must be the God of wrath in order for his mercy to have meaning.[121]

God's vengeance has gracious limits. Judah has "served its term" for the present time. Therefore, terms of vengeance serve to emphasize the surety of the coming execution of God's enemies and the advent of divine comfort, peace, and restoration (1:7,12-13,15; 2:2) of Judah and other nations. In this sense, וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה also functions to assure Judah that God's present vengeance on it will not last forever. In the Decalogue and again in Ex 34:7, the LORD declared that divine vengeance is limited "to three and four generations." Such a gracious limit is expressed in God's assuring words to Judah, "I will afflict you no more" (1:12).

A point about God's deliverance of Judah can be added here. The restoration of Judah, which comes by way of the LORD's destruction of its oppressor, is best understood as an act of God's free grace. In Ex 32-34 and in Isa 54, divine forgiveness and promise of blessings and protection from enemies are unreservedly

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[118] Roberts 1991: 39.
[119] Roberts 1991: 39.
[120] Sweeney (2000: 428) comments that the book of Nahum intends to make a point about the LORD's faithfulness to Israel "and that fidelity is expressed through YHWH's punishment of Nineveh" following the LORD's punishment of Judah through Nineveh (Isa 5-12).
[121] Patterson 1991: 26.

given; the benefits are in no way based on Israel's repentance or making a full restitution. They are based on divine freedom to show mercy and compassion on whomever he will (see 33:19). Likewise in Nahum, the promise of gracious deliverance and peace (in 1:8-15 and elsewhere) is given not based on any merit on Judah's part, but based on God's goodness (1:7) and other aspects of who God is.

While Judah now receives divine grace and deliverance, this does not imply Judah therefore has immunity from divine justice and punishment. The declaration, "The LORD is good . . . He cares for those who trust in him . . . he will make an end of [his foes]" (1:7-8) warns Judah that ultimately only those who trust in the LORD will be saved. The example of the older generations of Israel who once received divine grace and peace flowing out of divine freedom to be gracious and compassionate (Ex 32-34) later to be destroyed for their persistent rebellion (Num 14) serves as a strong warning to Judah in the book of Nahum. Divine vengeance on the "enemy" and deliverance of "those who trust in him" flow out of God's identity as good. This would function to call Israel to true repentance and covenant loyalty. For those who trust in the LORD will the LORD restore "the splendour of Jacob" (2:2).

4.4. Divine Constancy

I will address two issues related to divine constancy. One issue is whether my interpretation of Nahum underestimates the differences between God's messages to Judah and God's message to Nineveh. The other is whether Nahum portrays God as uncharacteristically enjoying the act of destroying Nineveh.

(1) One might object that I have misinterpreted the message of Nahum by not adequately stressing the differences between God's responses to Judah and Nineveh. One might argue that because of the *election* of Judah, God's patience only applies to Judah and God's vengeance only to Nineveh. For example, Stonehouse draws a facile division between wrath to God's enemies and patience and readiness to manifest

power on Judah's behalf.[122] Of course, there is a distinction between Israel or Judah and the enemy nations presupposed by prophecies like Nahum's, but the alleged significance of this contrast in Nahum (according to scholars like Stonehouse) is overstated and implausible, as I will now explain.

I have already shown that in Nahum vengeance for Assyria (represented by Nineveh) is simultaneously mercy and deliverance for Israel. This conclusion does not in any way support the idea that the two nations experience exclusively one reality, whether it is vengeance or mercy. I have already shown that *both* patience and vengeance are first revealed and applied to Israel in Ex 34:6-7 (cf. Num 14). The character of God as "slow to anger" does not change radically depending on the nation with which God is angry. God retains a consistent disposition of righteousness to all.

This is related to the way in which the message of vengeance on Nineveh *indirectly* serves as a warning to Israel, lest they too fall under God's punishment. Again, Coggins and Re'emi properly state that although the message of vengeance is directed against God's "adversaries, that expression may include not only Israel's enemies but also, in the frequent times of its falling-away, Israel itself."[123] While God does not utterly destroy Israel, due to his covenant with it, God by no means spares Israel from severe punishment.

Conversely, the rather general message of hope and deliverance in the psalm in 1:2-10 is applicable to anyone (in Nineveh or Judah) who would "seek refuge in [the LORD]" (v.7). Again, as God's vengeance can serve as a warning to Judah, so also God's gracious goodness (Nah 1:7f) can serve as a message of hope, even to sinful Gentile cities and nations. As such, Nahum is theologically compatible with the book

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[122] Stonehouse 1929: 103. See Chapter 2 for a similar interpretation given by Calvin in relation to "vengeance" or judgment" in Ex 34:7.
[123] Coggins and Re'emi 1985: 21.

of Jonah, especially in Jonah's echo of the formula (Jon 4:2). Jonah states explicitly what is implicit in Nahum: that the LORD who is "slow to anger" will entirely relent from bringing calamity upon sincere repentance—even for the wicked city of Nineveh. The God who cares for, warns, and saves Nineveh in Jonah is the God who warns Nineveh of the impending judgment in Nahum. While Nahum puts emphasis on the LORD's awesome power to destroy cruel oppressors such as Nineveh, Jonah calls attention to the LORD's powerful patience and mercy that warns and saves even the ungodly people who at another time is known for their "endless cruelty" against the nations and defiance against the LORD. This testifies to God as a righteous judge whose patience has left room for repentance and forgiveness along the way (cf. Jer 18:7f)[124] and whose desire for all nations is redemption and restoration (cf. Isa 54). The holy God will deal with all humankind according to the way his merciful justice dictates. The LORD will chastise, suffer long, threaten, relent, avenge, defend, rescue, redeem, and restore "according to the demands of His holiness"[125] and goodness.

The consistency in God's dealing with all humankind according to God's constant character is what is strongly affirmed in the Twelve. Nahum is not creating a new vision of God but is presenting a view of God that is consistent with the Twelve's presentation of the LORD. The creator God cares for and rules over the whole earth. All those who are proud will be judged. By producing proper repentance, judgment makes a way for redemption and restoration (Jon 3:4-10; Zech 3:9). From the perspective of the nation that is utterly destroyed, divine redemption and restoration are irrelevant. However, from the perspective of all the nations as a whole, God's

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[124] Yet the "tendency" of Nahum's testimony (in some contrast to the case in Jonah) is that the Ninevites of his day would not repent even if they were given the chance. They are impenitent and defiant. Of such people, Calvin (1950 [*Minor Prophets* vol. 3]: 422-23) rightly says "those who think they will escape the hand of God, they will surely be punished."

[125] Patterson 1991: 24.

destruction of the nation that threatens the life of the whole is indeed what paves way for the redemption and restoration of the whole. A similar dynamic, the destruction of a few within the whole to make life viable for the whole, was noted in my discussion of Ex 34:6-7. The theology of Nahum concerning divine goodness, expressed both in terms of vengeance on his foes and salvation of the repentant, is consistent with the divine character as revealed in Ex 34:6-7 and in the Twelve.

(2) Brueggemann erroneously claims that the rhetoric of Nahum suggests "something like delight (Yahweh's delight? Israel's delight?) in the anticipation of an orgy of death, blood, and violence (cf. 2:9-10; 3:5-7). Israel's resentment is fully taken over, embraced, and acted on by Yahweh" (274-275). I have already stated that the LORD provides an opportunity for repentance even for his foes, because the LORD does not delight in the destruction of the wicked (cf. Ezekiel 33:11). Through the use of various word pictures, metaphors, and similes, the text makes plain the awesome, complete, and final nature of divine judgment against Nineveh. But the language does not necessarily imply that God therefore enjoys its destruction or the acts of violence that will befall it. Yes, the text does hint at the fact that the people who had been cruelly oppressed will rejoice at the fall of Nineveh (3:19). But "rejoicing" is a description of Judah's natural response to the defeat of its enemies, rather than a description of divine sentiment over the destruction of the wicked. What oppressed nation would not rejoice at the fall of their cruel oppressor?

In Exodus, divine punishment comes as God's gracious discipline for his people. In that context, divine patience mercifully delimits the extent of punishment and defers deserved punishment, allowing time for repentance and possibly pardon. In Nahum, divine patience is shown to God's enemy Nineveh in the gracious deferment of punishment (and in the giving of a prophetic warning about the coming destruction). Such divine patience even with the most cruel, as Nineveh clearly was,

potentially rouses doubt in divine power, faithfulness, and justice. If God is patient with a powerful and cruel enemy to the extent of risking his reputation, being perceived as impotent, indifferent, or unjust, God's longsuffering is indeed great. Divine patience shows *divine reluctance to punish the sinner*, rather than delight as Brueggemann has erroneously suggested. There is no room to question divine justice and righteousness in divine vengeance.

5. Concluding Remarks

Both of the echoed phrases in Nah 1:2-3 function within the same range of meaning already suggested by the formula and its context in Exodus. The aspects that are new in Nahum when compared with Exodus display a *different application* of the same fundamental meaning of each echoed phrase or term.[126] What requires the application to be different is the different level or stage of sinfulness that a patient God deals with in Exodus (along with most of the other echo-passages) as opposed to in Nahum. The two nations are simply at different points in their "history of sin." Therefore, God's patience and vengeance are expressed in different degrees and ways. Despite the different emphasis and function of the phrases in Nahum vis-à-vis Ex 34, the two passages present a view of God that is consistent.[127] Nahum is not creating a radically different portrayal of God's character.

Brueggemann states, more generally, that God's mercy and vengeance are in profound contradiction within God's character, and his comments on Nahum reflect

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[126] In effect, Fishbane and Brueggemann tie the meaning of "slow to anger" in Nah 1 too tightly to only one of its many possible functions, applications, or "significances." In hermeneutical terms, their shared false assumption amounts to the collapsing of the proper distinction between "meaning" and "significance." The term "significance" corresponds to and includes what I have referred to as "function," "application," or "emphasis" (each with different but complementary connotations).

[127] In this connection, one could say that insofar as the psalm of Nah 1 has to do with the character of God (as it clearly does in vols. 2-3) it has a universalistic message that applies to Assyria and Judah alike. One could argue that theologically the whole prophetic reflection of Nahum ought to be interpreted as applying to both Judah and Nineveh, apart from the question of the original recipient.

this theological view. As I have shown, the unity between vengeance (an expression of God's righteous will) and mercy in Nahum is strongly confirmed by the phrase "slow to anger" (1:3) quoted from the formula as a qualification on God's wrath. This is the quotation that Brueggemann mistakenly regards as "insignificant" or marginal for Nahum.

The compatibility between divine mercy and vengeance in Nahum is first seen in the fact that in divine patience, the LORD defers divine vengeance on his foes. Furthermore, in divine patience and mercy, God gives his enemies a warning, giving them a chance to repent. In light of the larger canonical context, an implied message of hope is given to Nineveh even within Nahum. The passage "the LORD is good and is a refuge on a day of distress" (1:7) in Nahum's psalm is a message that applies not only to Judah, but also to Nineveh. God redeems those who seek refuge in him regardless of their national origin. God's ultimate desire for Nineveh is not utter destruction; repentance could change God's attitude and intended action towards Nineveh (as in Jonah). When Nineveh does not repent, God must judge. When he judges, he judges in disciplined appropriateness. In the case of Nineveh with its extreme sins, "disciplined appropriateness," means nothing less than total destruction. Divine patience also assures that any expression of divine wrath on his enemies is just and timely. The LORD has mastery over his wrath and does not act in sudden anger.

Secondly, the compatibility between divine mercy and vengeance is shown in the fact that in the application of Nahum's psalm specifically to Nineveh and Judah, the vengeance of Nineveh and the merciful deliverance of Judah coincide.[128] Divine wrath and divine mercy are two sides of a coin. As Brown aptly puts it, "God's

[128] Moberly (1983: 87) offers a fine discussion of the relationship between vengeance and mercy for Israel. He is probably correct when he suggests, "it is His mercy which is ultimately predominant in His dealings with *His people*" (italics mine). See Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion.

protection is impregnable (Psalm 46:1) and it is squarely rooted in the assurance of God's judgment."[129]

Another evidence for the compatibility and even unity of divine vengeance and mercy is found in the declaration that "The LORD is good" (1:7). Both divine vengeance and divine patience are dimensions of divine goodness. Not only patience and mercy, but also "judgment issues from the well of goodness."[130] The divine attributes of Ex 34:6-7 make explicit the essential facets of divine goodness, which are compassion, grace, patience, supreme steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiveness of sins, justice, and vengeance. Nahum's psalm does not emphasize all of these features of divine goodness, but simply affirms, "The LORD is good" (1:7). That divine goodness has all these aspects means that God's goodness has built-in "elasticity," to use Karl Barth's term.[131] This "elasticity" or flexibility allows God to act in different ways (according to the many divine attributes of Ex 34:6-7) at different times (according to human conduct). God does not change arbitrarily, but in conformity with constant patterns of relating to human action, whether positive or negative. According to God's consistent moral nature, God consistently responds to human obedience and rebellion. Ultimately, the LORD, who is good, will save all those who trust in the LORD but "consume" all sin and sinners (and even the earth contaminated by sin) and "reign in righteousness over all the earth."[132]

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[129] Brown 1996: 71.
[130] Brown 1996: 71.
[131] Barth 1957: 496.
[132] Patterson 1991: 16.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

1. General Summary

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated the two parts of my thesis statement (as stated in Chapter 1):

> (1) The two halves of the formula in Ex 34:6-7 do not stand in contradiction to each other, nor are they theologically separable from each other. Rather, the LORD's mercy is integrated with the LORD's judgment (acts of punishment) and *vice versa*.
> (2) The basic theological content of the formula that speaks of God's mercy and judgment remains continuous throughout its varied applications in several selected echoes. The LORD's mercy and judgment remain integrated in these echoes. Some echoes emphasize the "mercy-side" of the formula more (e.g., Isa 54:7-10), while others emphasize the "judgment-side" more, (e.g., Nah 1:3), but the echoes do not set up divine mercy as either contradictory to, or separate from, judgment.

In the remainder of this section, I will offer a few comments that will illuminate the nature of these two claims. In section 2, I will briefly summarise the main argument of this thesis, which supports these two claims. Lastly, in section 3, I will state one possible biblical-theological implication of my conclusions.

What do I mean when I say that the two halves (the mercy-side and the judgment-side) of the formula "do not stand in contradiction to each other"? In the texts I have examined, I have shown that there are none of what John Goldingay calls "fundamental contradictions" or "substantial contradictions" regarding the LORD's character.[1] This is true both intratextually (within the formula or any given echo) and intertextually (between the formula and its echoes). On the intratextual level, some of the texts examined involve a juxtaposition of mercy and judgment that at first is difficult to see as coherent (e.g., Num 14). On the intertextual level, there are also significant differences between the emphases or outlooks of the various biblical texts we examined, perhaps bringing into play what Goldingay calls "contextual contradictions." However, when these texts are carefully examined in their literary contexts, they present—both individually and together—a coherent view of the character of God in which divine mercy and judgment are compatible

[1] See Goldingay 1987:21-25; see also Chapter 1, subsection 4.2.4.

and unified. I have thus shown the compatibility between divine mercy and judgment even when one or other of these aspects of divine character is being emphasized in a particular context.

My perspective on the question of "theological contradictions" obviously stands in contrast to the viewpoint of Walter Brueggemann in his *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997). His thesis of a disjunctive or contradictory rendering of Yahweh implies that there are substantial contradictions at work in the formula and in its echoes (intratextual) and even between passages (intertextual). Brueggemann supports this thesis largely by means of his atomistic or non-contextual interpretation of Ex 34:6-7 and several of its echoes—especially the ones I treated in this thesis. Lacking adequate sensitivity to the context in which these passages are found, Brueggemann repeatedly mistakes "contextual contradictions" for "substantial contradictions." Brueggemann fails to see the ways in which the context presents various aspects of divine attributes as integrated. Brueggemann also seems unable to see that the reasons why a given text or phrase emphasizes one aspect of Yahweh's character (either mercy/solidarity or judgment/sovereignty) more than another has to do with the specific contextual setting or situation in which that passage or phrase is found, not with the affirmation of substantially differing views of Yahweh.

In addition to showing that the theological testimonies to divine mercy and judgment in the four selected texts are not contradictory, I have shown that they are unified, integrated, or not separated. In these texts, the meaning of divine mercy and judgment (or justice) presuppose and require each other. If one takes away the LORD's mercy, then one loses a proper understanding of the LORD's judgment, and *vice versa*. A contextual-theological exegesis of the four passages consistently shows the mutual inclusiveness of divine mercy and judgment. This also implies a critique of Brueggemann's non-contextual way of speaking of divine mercy and judgment, which typically refers to one as if it were independent of the other.

2. A Summary of the Argument in Relation to Each of the Four Passages

The treatment of Ex 34:6-7 in its context is critical because the "formula" in Ex 34:6-7 is, from a canonical perspective, the base text of the echo texts. Chapter 2 allowed me to make an initial case for the harmony of divine mercy and judgment and to offer a detailed exposition of the key terms used for the divine character in the formula. (Most of these terms are found in the three echo-passages treated but none of them quote the whole formula).

For Chapters 3-5 on the echoes, I will summarise the main claims of these chapters by means of a two-fold pattern of organisation. First, I will treat the ways in which the echo-passage examined in the chapter is marked by discontinuity in its relationship to the formula in Ex 34:6-7. Then, I will speak of its continuity in relationship to the formula.

2.1. The "Base-Text": Exodus 34:6-7 in Its Context

The main points of the argument of Chapter 2 are as follows: Virtually from the time of the exodus, the nation of Israel demonstrates its disposition to rebel against the LORD. This is revealed most clearly and decisively in the golden calf incident in Ex 32. In this context, God reveals that the divine "way" (see Ex 33:13) of overcoming the problem of Israel's sin is found in the LORD's own compassionate and gracious character. The literary flow and arrangement of the formula's context shows that all of the divine attributes revealed in the formula are expressions and applications of divine goodness and glory. In other words, it is ultimately inappropriate to speak of positive and negative sides of God in the formula. In addition, divine freedom or sovereignty is specifically linked with the divine prerogative to be compassionate and merciful to those who deserve destruction. All of these points provide a case against Brueggemann's attempt to derive a disjunctive reading of the LORD from Ex 34:6-7.

In the first part of the formula in Ex 34:6-7a, divine freedom to be compassionate and merciful is expressed in divine patience, steadfast covenant love, and divine sin-

bearing. The LORD expresses these attributes by making reconciliation with Israel (see 34:8ff), even though the nation deserves total destruction.

Yet within this decision to preserve Israel, and thus to maintain covenant love and faithfulness to Israel, the LORD brings disciplinary punishments upon Israel. This is in accordance with Ex 34:7b, which points to the LORD's justice and capacity for vengeance and righteous judgment. Ex 32-34 and other related passages show that the LORD judges and punishes in order to discipline, chasten, and purify Israel, as well as to spur his people on to responses of greater obedience and holiness.

It is appropriate to conclude that judgment is itself an expression of God's compassion and grace for his covenant people. Divine judgment is indeed an expression of divine goodness. Divine judgment and temperate punishment are not alternatives to divine patience, faithfulness, truth, and forgiveness. Rather, all the aspects of God's character attested to in the formula function together as integral parts of God's goodness, compassion, and grace. God's mercy and patience temper and mitigate the full expression of God's wrath and judgments. Conversely, God's merciful punishment does not undercut or contradict God's mercy and forgiveness, but rather sustains them.[2] It sustains them because God's intention is for Israel to be a holy people standing in a righteous relationship with God. The portrayal of God in this important portion of Exodus is not self-contradictory or dualistic, but united and self-consistent.

2.2. Numbers 14:18 in Its Context

2.2.1. Discontinuity with Exodus 34:6-7

There are at least three specific contributions that Num 14:18 in its context of Num 13-14 uniquely makes to an understanding of divine mercy and judgment, contributions that are not emphasized in Exodus.

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[2] Childs 1992: 373.

(1) In Num 14 divine power or sovereignty (כֹּחַ) are explicitly related to various aspects of God's merciful and just character as depicted in the quoted portions of the formula. Moses calls upon the LORD to exercise God's sovereign power in the following ways: in patience, in love, in sin-bearing, and in punishment.

(2) Num 14 emphasizes varying degrees of sin and varying degrees of punishment. Israel's sin is the rightful theological framework for a proper understanding of divine jealousy and mercy.[3] The divine punishment upon various groups within Israel varies according to the culpability of each (e.g., the younger generation versus the older generation and the ten spies who instigated Israel's rebellion).

(3) Most importantly, in Num 14 the relationship between סְלַח "forgiveness" and punishment is made clearer than in Ex 34. The real content of סְלַח is the continuance of covenant life and reconciliation rather than the removal of punishment. Therefore, סְלַח does not exclude the LORD's righteous will to hold the sinner accountable. That is, within God's freedom to bear and remove human sin and affirm life is also his righteous will to "visit" the sin back upon the sinner. In "*surprising* faithfulness,"[4] God affirms Israel's life and maintains covenant relationship with them. Yet within divine חֶסֶד the covenant relationship, there is not only "room for punishment,"[5] but also a *requirement* for punishment and removal of sin and sinners in order to establish a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6; see 2.2.2 below). Severe punishment is carried out to some within Israel precisely because of the righteous requirement of God's covenant relationship with Israel and with all creation. Seen from this angle, punishment is meted out within the context of divine חֶסֶד and mercy. Put differently, it is *because* God is bound to the

[3] Tunyogi 1962: 385, comments that the narratives about the sinfulness of Israel illustrate "not the divine justice, but...the divine grace." I suggest, rather, that at least in Num 14, both divine justice and grace are equally evident, although justice (as punishment) functions within the overall context of grace.
[4] Sakenfeld 1975: 329.
[5] Sakenfeld 1975: 326.

Israelites in חֶסֶד that the LORD punishes them for this punishment serves the merciful purpose of disciplining and purifying them.

2.2.2. Continuity with Exodus 34:6-7

The basic claims about the relationship between divine mercy and judgment, which held true in Ex 34 also hold true in Num 14. This is so despite the new points of emphasis in Num 14. And thus I can develop further my critique of Brueggemann in relation to his comments on Num 14.

In his treatment of Num 14, Brueggemann asserts a polarized understanding of divine mercy and punishment, fundamentally the same misleading conclusion that he made in relation to Ex 34:6-7. He understands divine mercy and punishment as, respectively, separate expressions of God's faithfulness to Israel and of God's sovereign self-regard. However, I have demonstrated in Chapter 3 that God's commitment to God-self and commitment to Israel are one. God's unified commitment is to the promise that God swore to Abraham (Gen 15-22) and includes the blessing of Israel and all nations through Israel. A proper background to a proper interpretation of the divine character (whether in Ex 34:6-7 or in Num 14:18) is the understanding that God has made *one central commitment* to raise up a nation that will be a holy people to God (cf. Ex 19:5f) through whom the LORD will bless the nations and thus be glorified in all nations (cf. Gen 12:12f). To this end, the LORD deals appropriately with Israel.

The LORD's discipline of Israel in Num 14 is extremely severe because this is what is necessary in order to make a holy nation out of a "stiff-necked" people. Because human agents are rebellious, God has the burden of punishing and disciplining them. When a nation is lacking holiness, whether through idolatry, rebellion against God, or the rejection of God and his covenant, the LORD severely disciplines that nation. Thus, as testified in Ex 34 and again in Num 14, divine punishment does not fall outside the overall context of divine covenant grace and mercy—for all the nations (and even for all living things:

Gen 8:21; 9:12ff.) as well as for Israel. Divine punishment, whether in Ex 32-33 or in Num 14, serves the LORD's merciful and good purposes. This implies that, contrary to Brueggemann's assertions, God's sovereignty is not exclusively or even primarily about judgment and vengeance. Sovereignty is far more about the LORD's power to bless all nations through Israel despite human rebellion. For God to cease to be gracious and compassionate would mean ceasing to be the God revealed in Ex 34:6-7. Again, the portrayal of God in these important portions of Exodus and Numbers (both of which record major crises in Israel's life with God) displays a God who is not disjunctive or self-contradictory, but integrated and constant in character.

2.3. Isaiah 53: 4-12 and 54:7-10

2.3.1. Discontinuity with Exodus 34:6-7

In Chapter 4, I have shown that the echoed terms of Ex 34:6-7 in Isa 53 and 54 make several distinct contributions towards an understanding of divine mercy and judgment.

I begin by recalling some observations made about the echoed terms in Isa 53. First, instead of directly presenting God as a sin-bearer (as Ex 32-34 does), Isa 53 speaks of a distinguishable human agent (the servant) who does God's work of sin-bearing. That said, I have shown that the larger literary context of Isa 53 portrays the LORD as a servant who labours under Israel's sin in order to remove it from Israel as portrayed in Isa 43:24. Secondly, in the Servant Song, sin-bearing is presented explicitly as a work of suffering and as marked by a certain kind of vicariousness—a vicariousness that does not exclude appropriate punishment of the sinner. In Exodus, while divine suffering is hinted at in the expressions נֹשֵׂא עָוֹן וָפֶשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה in 34:7 and תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם in 32:32, it is nowhere explicitly related to a picture of vicarious suffering. Thirdly, and related to the second point, divine mercy and judgment, or atonement and punishment are demonstrated *simultaneously* in the punishment of the Servant in Isa 53. In Ex 32-34, however,

punishment of sin and mercy are expressed at different times; punishment is meted out to the sinners (in Ex 32) and then the LORD reveals himself to be the sin- and punishment-bearer who forgives Israel's sin (34:6ff). Fourthly, what is implicit in Ex 34:6-7 is made explicit in Isa 53. The nature of Ex 34:6-7 as a divine self-revelation of divine attributes implies that the divine revelation is applicable to both Israel and all nations and even creation. However, in the context of Ex 32-34, divine sin-bearing is applied only to Israel (since this passage is a narrative about Israel). In Isa 53, through the atoning work of the Suffering Servant, who is the "arm of the LORD" revealed, the LORD's works of self-giving and sin-bearing are directly applied to all nations.

I have also made some observations on the echoed terms in Isa 54, which again show a perspective on divine mercy and judgment that was not obvious in Ex 34. First, Isa 54 attests to a new covenant (established as a result of the Suffering Servant's life and work)—an everlasting "covenant of peace" that is unilateral, unconditional, and universal in character (54:10; cf. 55:3). Such a covenant is likened to another unilateral, unconditional, universal covenant made at the time of Noah. By comparison, the covenant that is re-established with Israel in Ex 34:10ff is more "contractual" in character, similar in form to the initial Sinai covenant of Ex 20. This is so even though the new covenant of Ex 34:10ff is re-established as solely based on divine compassion and mercy shown in divine freedom. Secondly, the explicit expectation of Second Isaiah which is plain in Isa 54 (implicit in 53) is that the LORD will extend divine mercy and compassion not only to Israel (as in Ex 34 or Numbers), but also to *all nations*. Redemption and restoration are ultimately extended to all nations (and even all creation) through Zion. Taken together and in their shared context, the echoes in Isa 53-54 indicate that the LORD deals with the nations on the same basis as Israel, that is, according to the revealed divine character.

The differences between the formula in Exodus and the echo-texts in Isaiah illuminate specific aspects of divine attributes. The similarities between the two passages tend to reinforce the compatibility between divine mercy and justice.

2.3.2. Continuity with Exodus 34:6-7

The terms from the formula echoed in Isaiah demonstrate the similarity between the atoning work of the LORD in Exodus and that of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. In Chapter 4, I observed how the shared vocabulary of Ex 34:6-7 and Isa 53-54 and its context reinforced my argument that the Servant does the work of the LORD in Israel for the salvation of the world. Accordingly, Ex 34 and Isa 53-54 have important shared theological elements.

Both in Exodus and in Isaiah, the LORD, or the LORD revealed as the Servant, effects the forgiveness of sins. In both, the LORD has the prerogative and the freedom not to punish Israel (and the nations) as their sins deserve. Yet in both cases, the LORD, acting alone or through the actions of his Servant, exercises divine freedom to bear and remove human sin/punishment, so as not to destroy sinners, but to affirm life. Such vicarious atoning work of the LORD and his Servant tempers divine justice or punishment. The LORD/Servant extends compassion and grace following a time of divine chastisement.

In Isa 54:8, a contrast is made between the brief and limited nature of divine wrath and enduring nature of compassion and kindness. This contrast stands in continuity with the contrast in Ex 34:6-7 which is between the enduring nature of divine love (expressed in "thousands") and the extremely limited nature of divine vengeance (expressed in "three to four"). Both passages demonstrate that God will hold the sinner responsible for any sin committed. God will not altogether acquit the guilty but will ultimately punish the sinner. Thus in Isaiah, the LORD punishes both Israel and the nations severely according to the measure of their sins. Again, the LORD does this to the end of establishing a righteous people of God in the world.

2.4. Nahum 1:3 and Its Context

2.4.1. Discontinuity with Exodus 34:6-7

In Chapter 5, I have shown that the divine attributes of patience and justice echoed in Nah 1:3 underscore divine power not only to control divine wrath, but also to effect justice. However the whole of Nahum's psalm, in which the echo appears, lays a stronger emphasis on divine power to punish the enemies of God than on the LORD's faithfulness to those who trust in the LORD. When the psalm is applied to Nineveh and Judah, divine retribution and vengeance predominate. All of these points stand in contrast to Ex 34:6-7 and its context of Ex 32-34 which are marked by an overall emphasis on divine mercy. Thus, the relationship between Exodus and Nahum presents what Goldingay calls a "contextual contradiction." However, Brueggemann claims that divine judgment in Nahum is unjust and oppositional to mercy and posits a "substantial contradiction" between Ex 34:6-7 and Nah 1:3. Yet, understood contextually his point is not warranted by the passage.

The explicit object of God's wrath and vengeance in Nahum is not Israel, but the city of Nineveh and the nation of Assyria. The book of Nahum focuses on how the LORD will bring decisive judgment on Nineveh for its cruel oppression of Israel and other nations. These differences between Exodus and Nahum lead Brueggemann to argue that the attributes of divine mercy are entirely absent in the context of Nahum, despite the fact that the echo in Nah 1:3 includes the phrase about the LORD being "slow to anger."

2.4.2. Continuity with Exodus 34:6-7

In Chapter 5, I have shown that there are important continuities between the formula and its echo in Nahum. Most importantly, even in the context of serious and profound judgment, Nahum still includes the affirmation that the LORD is "slow to anger" (1:3). This is confirmed by the fact that the LORD has not brought immediate judgment on Nineveh, but has patiently waited and, implicitly, provided opportunities for repentance.

In addition, Nahum declares that the "LORD is good" (Nah 1:8). Both divine vengeance and divine patience are expressions of divine goodness as is the case in Ex 33:19 and 34:6-7. For such reasons, the LORD's mercy and goodness remain very much integrated in Nahum, against the arguments of Brueggemann.

3. Implications: Avoiding Neo-Marcionism in Christian Biblical Theology

In this concluding section, I wish to reflect on how Brueggemann's dualistic understanding of God shares some important features with the second-century heretic Marcion. Insofar as this is true, Brueggemann could be called a "neo-Marcionite."[6] Marcion set up a dichotomy between the "God of the Old Testament" (of wrath, caprice, and harsh justice) and the "God of the Gospel" (of unconditional love without wrath and judgment). This understanding of God distorts the biblical witness to God in both testaments and leads to an impoverished (and often anti-Semitic) understanding of God.

To begin, I must point out that Brueggemann's Old Testament theology is *anti*-Marcionite in many ways. He wishes to uphold the diversity, this-worldliness, and "Jewishness" of the Old Testament, all of which Marcion rejected.[7] In addition, Brueggemann sees the Old Testament God as both loving and vengeful, both faithful and capricious. However, the vengeful and capricious nature of God is emphasized in Brueggemann to the extent that love and faithfulness become meaningless. Whereas Marcion embraced "a God of love," Brueggemann embraces and advocates a God of unrestrained wrath and vengeance. Furthermore, Brueggemann is clearly not opposed to the Old Testament or to its God. Indeed, Brueggemann favours and emphasizes precisely the "capricious" God of the Old Testament that Marcion rejects. Specifically, Brueggemann wishes to remedy the modern neo-Marcionism of the Liberal Protestants

[6] See Francis Watson 1997: 127f. It should be noted that Watson merely used the term without making reference to Brueggemann.
[7] See Brueggemann 1997: 730.

with their "propensity to insist that Yahweh's gracious fidelity has surely, decisively overridden Yahweh's harsh propensity to sovereignty, so that we hope for a God of love."[8] For Brueggemann, the God who is marked by "downright capricious irascibility" proves useful for his advocacy of justice.[9] He believes this God can achieve the destabilising effects that "a God of love" or of simple "retributive justice" cannot.[10]

However, Brueggemann is like Marcion in positing a kind of "theological dualism," a contradiction and separation of divine mercy and divine judgment. According to his opponent Tertullian, "Marcion's special and principal work" was "the separation of the law and the gospel."[11] The "good God" of the New Testament gospel "*could not* visit judgment or grow wrathful or take vengeance. He was characterised by 'serenity and mildness.'"[12] Jaroslav Pelikan states instructively, "Marcion resolved the tensions within the Christian doctrine of God by a radical separation, which purchased the doctrine of salvation at the cost of the doctrine of the unity of God."[13] By comparison, I could say that Brueggemann *maintains and intensifies* (rather than resolves) the tensions within the Jewish and Christian doctrine of God by the same radical separation, since he places that separation within the identity of one God. He does so in order to purchase, not the doctrine of salvation by grace, but the absolute doctrine of socio-political justice, which requires the reinforcement of a capricious and unstable (and thus destabilising) deity. Yet like Marcion,

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[8] Brueggemann 1997: 272; see Watson 1997: 127-176 on the neo-Marcionism of Schleiermacher, Harnack, and Bultmann.

[9] Brueggemann 1997: 740. Elsewhere he says that the tension between the two sides of Yahweh was allegedly pushed "theologically and rhetorically, until [Israel] had pushed it into the very life, character, and person of Yahweh" and created a view of God in which "Yahweh's future life in the world and with Israel is characteristically ominous" (272).

[10] Brueggemann says that part of the problem with "a God of love" is the insistence "that we live in a morally reliable, morally symmetrical world in which moral sanctions are inalienably linked to conduct. This insistence, which tends to be held selectively, wants to allow for no slippage for solidarity and fidelity in the face of harsh demand" (272), that is, in the face of the demand and "obligation to practice distributive justice" (737). He believes "a capricious God" who is not answerable to righteousness and who will punish beyond moral sanctions can scare people into the practice of "distributive justice."

[11] *Against Marcion* 1.19.1, as cited by Jaroslav Pelikan 1971: 72.

[12] Pelikan 1971: 74, paraphrasing Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 5.4.12 and 4.29.10.

[13] Pelikan 1971:75.

Brueggemann also purchases his desired doctrine "at the cost of the doctrine of the unity of God." Brueggemann does not literally posit two separate gods as Marcion did, but creates the same effect by positing one "schizophrenic" God with two contradictory sides, who is usually stable, but not always.

A key question in Brueggemann then is how one should understand God as a judge and how this relates to promoting justice through Old Testament interpretation and theology. Brueggemann is correct in seeing that overemphasis on divine love has led much of Modern Western Christianity to a state of complacency and indulgence, and this needs to be corrected. Brueggemann says that "a God of love" is particularly problematic "in the face of twentieth-century barbarism, and we wonder if such brutalities are without moral significance in a world of love, leaving the brutality unanswered and unrequited."[14] Thus, Brueggemann can be seen as providing a helpful reaction to the "cheap grace" of Modern Liberal Protestantism, which tends to ignore the judging aspects of God's relationship to his people and the world at large.

However, in his deconstruction of "a God of love," Brueggemann constructs a view of God, which swings to the other extreme of "abusive power" or "unjust judgment." As I stated above, Brueggemann has a strong motivation for exaggerating the tension between love and retribution or for pushing an abusive view of God—namely, the purpose it plays in his advocacy for justice. Brueggemann's God with his ominous, destructive, and relentless power can establish "concrete, socio-political justice in a world of massive power organized against justice."[15] In addition, Brueggemann hopes for a God who is not answerable to anything but "distributive justice" and who will move destructively against

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[14] Brueggemann 1997: 272.

[15] Brueggemann 1997: 736. This God makes the "harsh demand" that the powerful distribute their wealth to the poor (737). "Yahweh is a harsh, demanding, uncompromising God" (747), and just as "Yahweh is prepared to do massive, unrestrained violence against Nineveh" (274), so will he "act abrasively to maintain sovereignty against any who challenge or disregard that sovereignty" (270).

anyone who does not subscribe to his "distributive justice." A God who punishes beyond legal sanctions and who scares people into the practice of "distributive justice" is what is desired.

The question of whether or not Brueggemann's God can effectively establish any kind of justice is a topic of its own and cannot be adequately addressed here. I can conclude, however, by stating that neither the God of overindulgence nor the God of merciless judgment adequately represents the biblical God. Both only reinforce the unbiblical dualism between the God of "fire and brimstone" and the God of sacrificial love (whether such dualism is located in God's identity or in between the Old and New testaments). In downplaying the latter, Brueggemann in effect opts for the former. What is needed is not reinforcing or reiterating in different terms the old dualism and polarisation between punishment and forgiveness, or between judgment and grace.[16] Instead of either the Scylla of judgment without mercy and the Charybdis of mercy without judgment, the Old Testament offers a more holistic and integrated understanding of who God is and of God's relationship to his people. This is precisely what I have shown in this thesis.

[16] In conclusion, I wish to clarify that my anti-Marcionite understanding of the God of the Old Testament (as possessing a unified, non-contradictory, and basically merciful character) should not be understood as the introduction of a New Testament theology into the Old Testament. Rather, it is a response to the Old Testament made in the belief that the text itself "pressures" its readers to make such a formulation. (See Childs 1997: 17, where he makes a similar point about the early church's formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity; the church thus does not introduce "a foreign component of Greek speculation into the Hebrew tradition.") The various Jewish interpretations of the Old Testament that prioritise mercy over judgment or that harmonize the two (e.g., Rashi in the Medieval period and Jacob Milgrom in the contemporary academy) would testify to this fact. Such Jewish scholars reach a position very similar to my own, and no one would accuse them of reading the New Testament into their Old Testament interpretation.

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